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October 3, 1893.

No. 845.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXIII.



OR,

The Sport-Queens of Hard Knocks.

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AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WONDERFUL WIRE-WALKER.

"The devil!"

"That's jest what et ar'!"

"Horns, hoofs, tail and all, by Jinks!"

The citizens of Hard Knocks stood on the street in front of the Nickel Plate Saloon and the White House Hotel, gazing upward in amazement.

THE SIMPLETON HAD RUN FORWARD, AND PLACED HIMSELF IN FRONT OF
BLUSHING BLANCHE.

If there is nothing new under the sun, here was something that was certainly new to the camp of Hard Knocks. And not only was it new, but decidedly startling as well.

A shouting in the air above the camp had caused those on the street to look up, and at what they there discovered the few set up a cry that brought the many out in a hurry, pellmell. The exclamations above quoted give some idea of what their astonished eyes beheld.

High up in the air, stretched across the gulch from "Needle Point" on one side to "St. Peter's Spire" on the other, two peaks said to be inaccessible, was a slender wire, looking almost like a thread of silk from the gulch bottom beneath; and on this wire, directly over the one street of the camp, deftly balancing himself with a pole, appeared a personification of his Satanic Majesty.

The time was early morning, and as the wire had not been there on the previous day, so far as any one knew, it must have been strung across during the night while the camp slept.

But, how?

That was a question which puzzled the crowd now as they gazed upon the daring performer.

Hundreds of feet above the ground, he appeared as much at home on the wire at that altitude as another performer might at the height of the housetops, and was stepping forward with perfect confidence.

"That's a dizzy ways up, ef he gets a fall, hang me ef et ain't!" cried one man, amidst the exclamations and comments on every hand.

"But, he can't fall, don't you see?" another called attention.

"Can't fall? How's that, Mayor Bob?"

"Why, dont you see he's got the wire circled with a rope fastened to the ends of that pole. Ef he slips, all he has got to do is to cling like grim death to his pole and he'll be all right."

"That's so, by Jinks!" agreed one of the first-quoted. "But, who ther doose is he? How did he get his wire up thar? An' how did he git on et after he had got et up?"

"What I'd like to know myself," observed Hank Hornblower, proprietor of the Nickel Plate Saloon, familiarly called Hank Horn. "And what's more, I'd like ter see how he is going to git down again. This beats any circus that ever struck Hard Knocks."

And so it did, of a truth.

Hard Knocks was a live camp, quite a place in its own estimation and quite a "hard" place in the estimation of others.

The leading man of the town, or one of the leading, was Bob Smith, the mayor, who was likewise proprietor of the White House Hotel. Hank Hornblower was another, and these two ranked almost equal with Major John King, manager of the Sparkler Mine.

Perhaps the latter should have been mentioned first, but, then, it is said the first shall be last. The mine-manager, "King John" as he was popularly known, was undoubtedly the first citizen in importance, since the Sparkler Mine was the chief support of the camp.

This gentleman was present now, looking, with everybody else, at the mysterious personage on the yet more mysterious tight wire.

"What do you think about et, King John?" inquired Mayor Smith.

"It's a great mystery, Bob, sure's you live. I don't know what to make of it. Everybody seems certain that rope was not there yesterday."

"Ef et was, nobody seen it, that's sure. And even ef it was there yesterday, how did the man put et there? That is what stumps me worst of all. Don't understand how it was done."

"See! He's goin' to speak, or jump off, or do somethin'!"

So one man called attention; but it was not necessary, for every eye was fixed upon the performer.

He had now about reached the middle of the wire, and had stopped and was carefully balancing himself as if about to do some trick.

Having secured his balance to his satisfaction, he gradually stooped until he could lay hold upon the wire with his hands, and in that position he remained for some moments.

He was doing something, but at such a height no one could tell just what.

Presently it was done, and a banner dropped and floated on the breeze, while the performer, carefully rising, waved his hand to the crowd.

The banner was of red, a little longer than wide, fastened to the tight wire with three or four loops and weighted at the bottom in order that the wind might not displace it.

But, this was not all. On it, in letters of white, were these words:

"SONS OF BELIAL, TREMBLE!"

I have come to claim my own. Prepare ye! Know that I am— SATAN."

And as the citizens of Hard Knocks read, they were filled more with bewilderment than before.

For some seconds no one spoke, but all simply stood and stared, and the performer, having bowed and saluted this way and that, turned and started along the wire the way he had come.

Said one man:

"Ding me ef I ain't a notion ter try a shoot at him!"

And as he said so he drew and cocked his revolver, but looked at the mayor as if for permission.

"You couldn't do et with anything short of a rifle, Dan," the mayor declared. "Ef ye hit him with a revolver it would be more by accident than smartness."

"Will you give me leave ter try et?"

"No, don't do it," here put in King John. "Let him go, and let's see how he will get off the wire."

"Yes, that's so," promptly agreed the mayor. "Ef it's the Old Boy, he's proof 'gainst bullets anyhow; and ef it ain't it's a man, and we ain't got nothin' to kill him for."

The crowd fell in with this view of the matter, and all stood and watched the plucky acrobat as he made his way up the dangerous ascent in the direction of the peak called Needle Point.

Not a man among them had ever seen the like of this before. Some had seen tight-rope performances, but never to equal the present feat. One ventured to suggest that it *must* be His Majesty, of a truth, for nobody but the devil would be equal to such an undertaking.

Slowly and carefully, step by step, the intrepid funambulist advanced, the ascent becoming steeper and more steep every moment. He wonderfully maintained his equilibrium, the length of the pole he carried enabling him to balance himself easily, till at last the incline became so sharp that further advance seemed impossible to those who watched from below.

A few steps further, and the masquerader dropped down and caught hold of the wire with his hands, and swinging off, went hand over hand further up, somehow carrying the pole with him. In this manner he advanced a considerable distance further, till he came to what looked to be a knot in the wire, where he stopped and was seen to be doing something with the pole and the rope attached to it.

His plan was soon made manifest, then.

He was seen suddenly to drop away from the wire, supported by the rope which he had affixed to it, and for a considerable distance he slipped downward with lightness and ease. The end of the rope reached, he began to swing, further and higher at each effort, and finally he succeeded in landing firmly upon a ledge of rock lower down than the top of the peak where the wire was secured; and there, cutting the rope, he bowed once more to the crowd and disappeared around a projection and out of sight, carrying the pole with him.

CHAPTER II.

TWO MYSTERIES NOW.

To this time the crowd had been holding their breath, almost.

The moment the performer disappeared there was a great sigh of relief on every hand, and men's tongues were loosened.

Everybody and his neighbor talked at once, and it was like Babel let loose, at first. There was one point upon which all agreed—that Hard Knocks had been unwarrantably insulted.

"I want to know," stormed Mayor Bob Smith, "ef this hyer ain't a little bit more'n we ar' called upon to stand? Who was this galoot that's had the gall to denounce us as sons of Beelyull? Ar' we goin' ter 'low that red rag ter flaunt in our faces up thar?"

"No!" cried the crowd, to a man almost. "No!"

"That's what's ther matter!" the mayor confirmed. "Et has got ter be yanked down from thar, somehow, ef we have to 'rect a scaffold high enough to reach it. Come ter claim his own, has he, cuss him! Wants us ter prepare, does he? You kin jest bet your hoofs we *will*, Mr. Bullzybeeb; we'll prepare to give you the hottest reception ye ever got, ef you show yourself on that string again, and don't you forgit et!"

"But, Mayor Bob, how ar' ye goin' to git et down?" was asked. "Thar is not enough stuff in ther hull gulch to make a scaffold that high."

"To be sure there isn't," asseverated Major King. "It looks to me as though it is there to stay, Bob."

"No, I'll be yanked ef it's there to stay!" the incensed mayor cried. "I'll give a hundred dollars to the man who will tear it down. Do you hear what I say, boys? A hundred dollars to the man who will take that rag off'n that wire and give it to me!"

"And I'll chip in another hundred along with et," here proposed Hank Hornblower. "Things have come to a purty pass ef we have got to put up with a taunt like that flyin' over our heads. Do ye know what it means, boys? It means that we're all sons of ther devil! Now I fer one 'bjeet, and the sooner the rag is down from there the muchlier I'll be pleased."

"Yes, and I'll see et three hundred better and make et five, if at ther same time ye will ketch the cuss that put et there," the mayor made additional offer. "Now, you galoots, thar's a prime chance fer some man to pick up a grub-stake that's not to be sneezed at. That thing has got to come down, in one way or another, and I'm the man that says so. Two hundred for the red rag; three hundred more for the man that hung it there!"

The crowd gave a cheer, and a score or two of eager men set off at once to try their hands at earning the offered prizes.

"I don't see how it is going to be done, though, Bob," the mine-manager observed. "The more I think about it the more impossible it appears. There's not a man here can scale either Needle Point or St. Peter's Spire to the places where the wire is made fast, and if you can't get at the wire you certainly can't get the banner down; and hence, what are you going to do about it?"

"Ef there's no other way, we'll shoot et."

down?" the mayor made answer. "Let go a volley at it anyhow, boys, jest fer luck!"

As he spoke he drew his own weapon and blazed away, and following his example almost every man in the crowd who was armed fired a shot or two at the offending red banner, till at least a couple of hundred had rung out.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the mine-manager. "How long do you think it would take you to get it down that way, Bob? I'll swear there are not a half a dozen holes in it, out of all the shots fired. Not that I'm not as anxious as the rest of you to have it got down from there; but, I don't know how to do it."

"Is et possible that we hev got to let et swing there?" the mayor considered. "Have we got to put up with this slap in the face, and not be able to help ourselves? Got to take et fer gruel fer breakfast, dinner, and supper, too, that we are sons of Bellyull? Et's a purty how-d'e-do ef we can't invent some means of gettin' et down. But, let's wait to hear from them that's set out, fore we give up."

For a time breakfast was forgotten—it was early morning, as has been said—and the citizens remained in the street, still gazing upward at the hated banner, every man trying to invent some scheme for its removal.

Finally, however, their appetites began to remind them, and gradually the crowd dispersed.

It was a couple of hours later when the men came back who had set forth for Needle Point and St. Peter's Spire, and their report as rendered to the mayor was one of entire and utter failure.

They had seen nothing of his Satanic Majesty nor any sign of him, and as to reaching the wire at either point, that was utterly impossible. At each end it was secured high up on the slender pinnacle of rock, where it did not seem possible that any man could have reached.

The mayor paced the piazza of his hotel, chewing madly at his mustache, while he listened to these things.

"By glory," he cried, when the report was finished, "I'll tell ye what I'll do; I'll offer a reward that will fetch et! I'll give a thousand dollars spot cash to the man, woman or kid that will invent a means of getting that banner down from there!"

"That's ther talk, old man!"

"An' somebody will scoop et, you bet!"

"And, what is more," the mayor went on to say, "if that imp of darkness shows himself up there again I want you to tumble him with a rifle. Do ye hear? I want him shot and brought to the ground. Who knows but he had something to do with the other mystery that's been worryin' us."

The mayor here referred to a matter which had caused the camp as much excitement, but in another way, as now had this mysterious rope-walker, and that not a great while before.

One morning the camp had awakened to find a couple of her respected citizens laid out in the middle of the street, stiff, stark dead, head against head, each with a knife in his breast, with the right hand of the other grasping the hilt in death.

Who had killed these men, and why, were mysteries.

It was suggested that maybe they had fought, but that idea was discarded at once.

There was not the least sign of a contest anywhere around, and appearances went to indicate that the men had died without a struggle.

Then it was hinted that perhaps it had been a case of mutual murder, so to put it; that by agreement each had stabbed the other, at the same moment, and so they had simultaneously ended their lives.

That, too, however, was derided. It would have been impossible, it was shown, for their arms to have driven the knives

with such force, lying in such positions; the muscles could not have been sufficiently exerted to accomplish the desired end. No; a third person had done the deed for both.

But, who had it been?

That was the puzzling question, and no one could answer it.

The victims of the crime were Everett Wilson, a gambler sport, and Palmer Connor, superintendent of the Sparkler Mine.

It was known that these two had not been friends, yet it was not thought they were deadly foes; but, then, it was not believed they had met and fought, for the reason given.

They had been rivals for the favor of one Dashing Diantha, as she was called, something of a sport and gamester—if these words can be made to fit the gender; but it had not been supposed that anything serious would ever grow out of that.

Mayor Smith had taken the affair in hand at once, to try to sift it and bring the murderer to justice, but had failed signally. Neither he nor his aides could find a single clue, nor could any one else who laid claim to detective talent; and so it was that, when these gave up, Major John King, or King John, sent for the famous Prince of Detectives, Deadwood Dick, Junior.

This detective had not yet arrived, but he was looked for and expected at any moment.

"Maybe you have struck it, Mayor Bob," agreed Hornblower, falling in with the last remark of the mayor instantly. "Jest as maybe as not that's it. And anyhow, when this Deadwood Richard arrives that King John here has sent for, I'll bet he'll be the one to yank that thousand of yours, mighty quick. By the way, Mr. King, ain't it high about time he got hyer?"

"It certainly is, Hank," the mine-manager made answer. "I have been on the lookout for him for several days now."

"And the sooner he comes the better," averred Mayor Bob. "He'll have two cases instead of one, and I'm bettin' my boots it will try what he's good for to tell us how the devil got that wire up there; to say nothin' about who killed Connor and Wilson."

The crowd took it up for comment, while the mayor set about writing a notice which he presently posted on the hotel piazza, and which ran thus:

"NOTICE.

"We, the which same is us, ourself, the Mayor of Hard Knocks, do hereby offer and proclaim a reward of one thousand dollars spot cash to the man, woman or child who will invent a plan by which the red banner, now afloat above this camp, much to our displeasure, can be got down and delivered to us, we the aforesaid.

"ROBERT SMITH, the Mayor."

CHAPTER III.

SOME ARRIVALS SCORED.

This camp of Hard Knocks enjoyed the distinction of having a Pony Express to bring its mail in advance of the lumbering stage.

By this arrangement the mail arrived in the camp a little after the dinner hour, while the stage did not reach there till six o'clock in the afternoon, and was frequently later than that.

On this day the mail brought a letter for Major John King—it brought several letters for him, for that matter, but this one in particular; and as soon as the major had read it he set forth in haste to find Mayor Bob Smith at the White House, to show it to him.

"What is et, King John?" the mayor asked, seeing immediately that it was something of importance.

"It's a letter from that detective, Dead-

wood Dick, that's what," was the not over-pleasant answer. "Says he can't come under a week or two longer."

"Whew! That is deuced bad, by glory it is. The murderer of Connor and Wilson may be a thousand miles from here by that time. What's the matter with the feller, that he can't come now?"

"I give it up; his letter is short and to the point. Says he may find it impossible to see me under a week or two, and if I can get any one else to take up the case, not to wait for him but go ahead. If nothing has been learned by the time he does get here, he'll do what he can."

"Well, that settles it, I suppose; but, if I have got to look at that red rag wavin' up there fer as long a time as that, I'll be a howlin' idiot. I can't stand et, King John, and that's the plain fact. Can't you think of some plan to get et down? Come, you ar' used to mine rigging and such; just bend your mind to this problem."

"No use, Bob, I have been thinking about it ever since it was put there, and I'll have to give it up. Don't see how you are going to get it down; I guess you'll have to grin and bear it."

They discussed the matter at great length, but in the end were no nearer a solution of the puzzle than when they had commenced.

The afternoon passed quietly, and by night the excitement had died out.

For a wonder, the stage came in on time.

This was undoubtedly owing to the fact that it brought a light load, for on this occasion it had but two passengers.

One of these rode on the box beside the driver, and was a sport of the first water, as his appearance straightway proclaimed. He was a dandy from tip-top.

He began in a pair of finest patent-leathers below and ended under a shining silk hat above, while between these extremes was a stretch of elegant broadcloth set off with a gilt-edge "billed" shirt, collar and cuffs. As one man said at sight, he was a sparkler.

Thirty years of age, apparently, he was decidedly good-looking, having a splendid form and physique, and sporting a pair of attractive side-whiskers. He might have passed for a fashionable rector, idol of some wealthy parish, but for the fact that he sported a superabundance of jewelry. He glittered in diamonds and flashed with rings and chains.

Said one man:

"Durn et, but he must be a rich vein, pards; hyer's a cool ten thousing in plain sight."

The other passenger mentioned was a woman.

She was dark of face and of uncertain age, and was very peculiarly clad, all of which was noticed as she got out of the stage.

Traveling alone, she had with her several bundles, and a hideous-looking cat was perched upon her shoulders when she alighted, giving her, together with her peculiar dress, something the appearance of a witch.

"Good sir," she addressed the driver, in a high-keyed voice, "is my baggage all right?"

"I reckon et ar', ma'm," was the answer. "Nothin's bu'sted, and I guess we'll find et all hooked up ahind thar, same as it was put at startin'. I took keer to make et secure, ye know."

She had been investigating for herself, while the driver was delivering himself of this, and appearing satisfied with its condition, thanked the Jehu and turned toward the hotel. The eyes of the crowd followed her, and no one spoke until she had disappeared.

"Ef she ain't a witch, then my mammy never spanked me, that's all I have ter say," remarked the driver, with something of awe in his tone; "an' as ter my mammy's doin'

that, I opine a critical 'vestergation would disclose ther scars of numerous hot blisters on my personal 'natomy."

He said it so gravely that it created a laugh immediately.

"I quite agree with you, sir," spoke up the elegant sport. "I never felt so uncomfortable on any trip in my life as on this. Somehow I felt as if that infernal cat was going to spring upon me any moment. She's certainly a witch, or worse, and you may depend on it."

Mayor Bob and King John exchanged glances.

The same thought had come to each, and in the same moment it was expressed in words by Hank Horn.

"Mebbe she's the better-half of the Old Boy, and has come to assist him in claiming his own. See that 'ar notice away up thar, Six-hoss Sid?"

This to the driver.

The driver looked up, and reading the words upon the banner, which appeared with wonderful distinctness in the light of the setting sun, he exclaimed:

"Wull, I ber durn! Mebby et won't be well fer me to stay hyer all night, ef that 'ar means business; my mammy uster have a way of callin' me an imp of Satan when she couldn't think of anything worse, and somehow et got fixed in my mind that meby she was more'n half right."

Another laugh, for Six-hoss Sid was full of such nonsense, which was greatly enjoyed by his admirers whenever he saw fit to let it loose.

"Yes, and see this notice of mine right hyer," the mayor called attention to the placard he had posted on the piazza. "Hyer's a thousand dollars to the man who is smart enough to think of a plan to git that banner down from thar. Stranger," addressing the broadcloth sport, "maybe you would like to pick et up. You look as though ye might have somethin' 'sides bees in that caput o' yours."

The glittering sport had stepped to the piazza while the mayor was talking, and was now reading the notice, smiling as he did so—probably at the unique manner of its wording.

From the placard he looked up at the offending banner.

"I don't know about that," he said. "If you have got a balloon you may stand some chance of getting it down, but I don't see how you are going to do it otherwise. I am afraid it is there to stay. But, can't you take the wire down from where it is fastened?"

For answer to that the whole matter was explained, and when he had heard all he shook his head.

"I guess I'll have to give it up and let the thousand go to some one else," he remarked. "The man who put the wire up there will have to be the one to take it down again. But, who is proprietor of this palace?"

"Happens to be me," declared Mayor Bob, proudly. "Walk right in, sir; and my man will 'tend to your wants in short order."

So, the gilt-edge sparkler entered the hotel and walked to the desk.

There he made known his wants, and the register was shoved out for him to inscribe his cognomen thereon.

Taking up the pen the sport dipped it, and then stopped, holding it poised while he read something that had already been written on the page before him.

"Who is this Madilene—Madame Madalene?" he inquired.

"The woman who just came by the stage," the man at the desk answered. "She is clear old business, she is, and she popped in here and registered in a jiffy."

"I should say she must have done so. Madalene, the Fortune-teller, eh? That was what I took her to be, at first sight.

Chance for you to learn in what year you'll be hanged, gentlemen."

Having so said he proceeded to register.

And the name he inscribed was—

"HIGH HORSE."

"What the deuce kind of a name is that?" the astonished clerk demanded.

"Why, what do you find the matter with that name?" the man inquired. "It is plenty good enough for me."

"And you mean to tell me that *is* your name?"

"Certainly; what would I be wearing it for, if it wasn't?"

"High Horse—High Horse—What?"

"No; simply High Horse. That is all there is of it, sir, nothing before it and nothing after it. Just High Horse; simply that and nothing more."

"Well, but where are you from?"

"Anywhere and everywhere, sir; always on the go."

"Yes, but where do you live? That is what I mean. Where do you *live*?"

"My good fellow, I am living here at present, right here before your eyes. Do you not see I'm alive?"

The sport was cool and smiling, while Mayor Bob's man was red in the face and greatly worked up. This was about the queerest customer he had ever run up against in his experience.

"That—that's good enough for a joke, sir," the clerk made rejoinder, "but I would like to have you register some place; some place where you are from, or where you live, or some place you call home; don't you see? Same as this woman has registered as from Carson."

"Ah! that is what you are coming at, eh? Well, if that is all, I'll have to oblige you. Thought you wanted to investigate my pedigree. You want some place where I live, some place I call home. Well, sir, while I'm here I'll be living here, unless some man gets the drop on me when I'm not looking; and while I'm living here this will be my home. Am I right?"

"Yes, I suppose so, sir."

"And the name of your city is Hard Knocks. There, that fills the bill first rate, and as I'm used to hard knocks anyhow, it's quite appropriate."

So the sport finally registered, and having done so he turned away, leaving the clerk to make much or little of it, as he saw fit, since that was all he would be likely to get out of the stranger. And when he had suppered, this same High Horse set forth to see the sights of the camp.

CHAPTER IV.

SCENE IN THE NICKEL.

ONE of the characters of this camp of Hard Knocks was a woman who was known by the name of Blushing Blanche.

She was a professional gambler, and ran a game in the Nickel Plate Saloon under the protection of Hank Hornblower; and the Nickel Plate was the saloon of the camp.

Good-looking and of splendid form, she was the attraction of the place, and as her game drew patronage to the saloon, that was accepted by the worthy proprietor as equivalent to rent for her privilege.

This woman was called Blushing because blushing she was; and that is to say, her complexion was of a rich, rosy redness that created, at first sight, the suspicion of paint; but, such it was not, for on one occasion, on a wager, she had washed her face in public.

On that occasion another woman, one Dashing Diantha, whose name has already been mentioned, was the one to raise suspicion, and it was she who offered to bet on the question. She was promptly taken up, and after Blanche had bathed liberally with soap she came out even more blushing than before, and so Diantha lost the wager.

Diantha was dark—that is, she was a brunette, but it could not really be said she was dark, for her face had something of a constant paleness, like that natural to a figure in wax. Both these women were called beautiful by their admirers, and that they were not friends was no matter of surprise; they were, in fact, rivals, since both were in the same line of business, though Diantha did not run a game; she was a player.

The business of the evening was just getting under headway in the Nickel Plate when the High Horse dropped in.

There was a dividing line in the room, though there was no partition, and the rear third of the space, set apart for the use of Blushing Blanche, was richly carpeted and nicely furnished.

Sauntering leisurely in, the elegant sport looked as leisurely about, and after a minute or so made his way to the rear where the woman gambler sat at her table like a queen enthroned, surrounded by players and her admirers who were beginning to assemble.

As the High Horse approached her table she looked up.

Any one observing her closely might have noticed that she gave a slight start on beholding him, though it could not have been called one of recognition.

He himself did not appear to notice it, and sauntered up to the table in a careless manner, like any one who was there simply to gratify curiosity and not in the way of business.

"Make your play, gentlemen."

The woman's voice sounded clear and rich, as she spoke the words.

Now the High Horse looked from the layout to her, and their eyes met, when the woman's face seemed to flush afresh.

"What is your limit, lady?" the sparkling sport inquired.

"One thousand, on a single bet, sir," was the gracious response. "Make your play, gentlemen."

"Why, that is only play indeed," the sport observed, carelessly. "You do not take very large risks, then, fair lady. That is hardly large enough to make it interesting."

"How high would you like to play, sir?"

"Oh, I had no thought of playing at all; I merely made a natural inquiry."

"Well, I am sorry, but that is a rule I have made, for a special purpose, and I cannot depart from it."

She called yet again for the players to make their play, and all having done so, proceeded with the deal, taking in a goodly little sum for the bank.

One rough player sprung up with an oath.

"Et ain't no use," he cried. "Thar's another month's pay blowed in, Blushin' Blanche, and nothin' ter show fer et. Et ain't no use my buckin' 'gainst your tiger no longer, nohow."

"I'm sorry for you, sir," was the sweetly spoken response. "Maybe you will have better luck next time."

"Hold on, sir! Keep your seat, pray," spoke up another woman's voice. "Let me lend you a small sum with which to try to win back your loss. If you lose it I will bear the loss and you will owe me nothing."

The speaker was Dashing Diantha, and a dark look settled upon the brow of the fair Blanche immediately.

"All right, ef you say so," the man assented, resuming his seat.

The woman slipped a sum of money into his hand, at the same time whispering something in his ear.

The fellow made his play, and as the fair dealer drew out the cards her rival looked at the High Horse, with something of the same interest the other had manifested.

The High Horse met her gaze for a mo-

ment, and then looked from her to the rosy dealer, as if comparing their beauty.

A whoop from the rough player who had just "gone broke" drew attention to the board.

The card upon which he had played had turned up winner.

"Bully fer you, Dashin' Dianthy!" he cried. "Give me another p'inter like that, an' I'll be able ter pay ye back ther loan and go it on my own hook again."

At this the woman smiled, and she indicated another card upon which he should venture. Again the fellow made his play according to her directions, and again he came forth the winner.

"I suppose the game is still limited, Red-face?" and Dashing Diantha turned to the dealer.

For just a second Blushing Blanche's face was pale, but immediately it was more flushed than ever.

"Did you address me?" she asked.

"Certainly; whom else?" was the rejoinder.

"Then please do so by my name. Yes, the game is limited, for *your* benefit, to one thousand dollars."

"Well, I'll have to submit to it, I suppose."

"You need not; you need not play here unless you insist upon it; you are barely welcome."

The High Horse seemed interested, and was smiling as he looked from one to the other, listening. Neither had spoken in high tone, but both were thoroughly in earnest, as was not to be mistaken.

"You may place this sum for me, sir," Diantha now said, speaking to the player whom she had helped. "Put your own bet with it or wherever you choose. It is a thousand, Blushing Blanche; let them run. If you will not raise the limit you cannot deny me the right to come up to it."

"I do not deny you that right; play as long as you can stand it."

"As long as the bank holds out, you mean," was the insinuating retort.

Again the player won, and again was the full limit staked by the cool woman, and so it went on till she had won five times straight.

On the sixth venture she lost, however, when she turned to the High Horse appealingly.

"Now see the disadvantage I am placed at," she said. "I cannot double, and so save myself."

"Which shows the folly of playing the limit," spoke up the dealer quickly.

"You certainly ought to stand it to lose one turn in six," suggested the High Horse, in response to the remark made to him.

"Yes, but when could I ever break the bank, at the same rate?"

"At the same rate, in a reasonably short time, I should think, fair lady."

She smiled at him, and moved nearer to where he stood while her player again placed her money and his own.

Again the winnings went to the bank, and so it kept on without a break until finally all of Dashing Diantha's winnings had been swept away and a thousand dollars besides.

She was now somewhat nervous, or if not that, then excited.

"There is crooked playing here somewhere," she cried. "You never had such a run of luck as that, Blusher."

"Do you mean to say I am cheating?" cried Blushing Blanche. "You had better have a care how you make such a charge. I play a perfectly straight game."

"I can attest that," spoke up the High Horse. "I've been watching it all through, lady," to Diantha, "and there has been nothing crooked, as you charge. You will have to charge it against Dame Fortune."

"Thank you, sir," said Blushing Blanche, looking up at him gratefully.

"Yes, and let me thank you, too, sir," from Diantha. "It is good to be so assured, in the face of the suspicion."

The whole crowd in the place had gathered around the table, for it could be seen the women were in deadly earnest, and greater excitement was looked for unless some one interfered.

On several occasions these women had come near to something serious, but each time some one had interfered to separate them, or at least to quiet them, and usually the friends of each were anxious that they should not be carried too far by their hatred of each other.

"My game is perfectly honest," Blushing Blanche insisted. "Had it not been, would I have placed a limit against you, do you think?"

"You might have done that as a blind; who can say? I certainly would not trust you."

"Ladies, please let me act as peacemaker," spoke up the sport.

"I notice you seem inclined to favor Miss Red-face," sneered Dashing Diantha. "Perhaps you and she are not unacquainted—"

"Take it back!" cried Blushing Blanche, springing to her feet with a revolver presented. "Take it back, I say, or I'll make your own face more like wax than it has ever been."

Dashing Diantha gave a little cry, and put up her hands.

"Don't shoot!" she cried. "Give me a fair chance if you are going to do that, Blushing Blanche!"

"Take it back, then! You have insulted me once too often, and I give you a fair warning not to do it again. Take it back!"

"Yes, I take it back, Blushing Blanche, seeing that I'm forced to do so. It is hardly a disgrace to make a retraction when compelled to do so. Sir," turning to the High Horse, "will you favor me with an interview at the hotel?"

"Immediately?" the sport asked.

"If not inconvenient, please."

"Very well, I will accompany you. Good-night to you, Blushing Blanche; my hope is to see more of you shortly." And lifting his hat politely, he accompanied Dashing Diantha from the place and across the street to the parlor of the White House.

CHAPTER V.

DASHING DIANTHA'S CONFESSION.

HIGH HORSE, the gilt-edge sport, could not but wonder what was coming, but of course it was impossible for him to guess.

Some passing remarks were made on the way across the street, and when they entered the hotel parlor the woman invited the sport to be seated, addressing him in her most gushing manner.

"You are wondering, I know, what I want to say to you," she then made remark, playfully.

"Well, yes, I confess that you have aroused my curiosity to a certain degree, my charming Diantha—the only name I know by which to call you."

"Dashing Diantha—that is the only name I have, sir. And your name is— You will have to pardon me, but I do not know how to address you at all, so pray help me out of my dilemma."

"I am called High Horse; an odd name you will think, but it is the best I can offer you on short acquaintance. But, then, what's the odds? A name is a name anyhow, and the sunflower by any other appellation would be just as gorgeous. You may call me High Horse."

"What a name! Hal ha! If you are married, is your wife Mrs. High Horse? I take it for granted you are *not* married, for I am sure a wife would never wear such a name as that; and, what is more, I greatly fear you never will wed, either, unless you

take a different name, for I can hardly imagine a woman who would be willing to exchange with you."

"I have no doubt you are right, Dashing Diantha, and when I come to consider matrimony I'll then cast about for a suitable name to offer the misfortunate creature. In the mean time, High Horse suits me quite well."

"Then no one else should say anything, Mr. High Horse; if it suits you, that is all there is about it."

"And, by the way, I am still wondering what you have got to say to me."

"Hal ha!" laughing merrily. "I suppose you are. But, then, I am a woman, and you will have to bear patiently with me. To begin with, Mr. High Horse, I want to tell you I am something of a fatalist."

"And in what way a fatalist?" the sport asked.

"In the full sense of the word; I believe that all things happen according to fate, and that everything that happens was so ordered to come to pass."

"And this belief, then, has to do with what you have to say to me? Well, I sometimes have something of that belief myself; but, then, I have seen a tall hustler bring fate around to suit him many a time, too."

"How unique you are! But, now to be serious, sir: You are an entire stranger to me, and I am the same to you, and yet I have a confession to make that will, at first, seem to you—well, startling, to say the least. I am going to be perfectly frank with you."

"Go ahead with it!" the sport invited. "I am not easily startled, and I feel sure I can stand it. You had better be careful how far you take an entire stranger into your confidence, though. As you have said, you do not know me."

"That is true, I do not know you, but believing as I do in fate, I am going to trust you. Now, are you prepared for my confession?"

"Yes; let her go. I guess I can stand it."

The woman laughed lightly at his careless manner, but immediately became serious again, as she said:

"My confession, then, Sir Stranger, is this: *I love you!*"

The sport simply smiled, and he looked at her searchingly as though he would read further her thoughts.

"Really," he made answer, "this is so sudden, Dashing Diantha. I hardly know what reply to make to you. Were it not for the fact that I'm an orphan, I'd refer you to papa."

The woman flushed, spite of her waxy appearance.

"You are, I see, inclined to make light of a serious matter—serious to me, at least," she said.

"Well, then, what answer do you expect me to make?" the High Horse asked.

"Let me make my confession in full, and then you will be able to answer without any help, I hope. The moment I laid eyes upon you I loved you, and I know that you hold all my future happiness in your keeping. Do not scorn me for the confession I am forced to make."

"Why are you forced to make it?"

"For this reason: All my life I have been holding my heart in check, not allowing it to go out to any man, fully believing that one day I should meet my fate, and now I have met—you. I love you, and if I cannot win your love in return this world will have nothing more for me. I do not ask you to answer immediately, sir; think it over and give me time to win your regard."

"You seem to have it bad, that's certain," spoke the sport, now seriously. "I am glad you do not press me, for I certainly cannot give you any encouragement at present."

"Then you do not love me? The same passion did not kindle in your own breast at the same moment?"

"It certainly did not. I admire you: no man should be censured for admiring beauty whenever it comes under his notice; but that is all, so far. I am as frank with you as you are with me, you see."

"But, you do not despise me for the confession I have made?"

"Not by any means."

"And you will try to love me?"

"I can make no promises in that direction."

"Why not?"

"I would not be dealing fairly with myself were I to do so, nor with you. I believe in leaving such matters perfectly free, so that the darts of Cupid may strike where they will."

"Well, since you put it in that light I cannot complain. I shall exert myself to the utmost to win your love, however."

"And that I certainly cannot prevent; it is your own matter."

"There is a favor I would ask."

"What is that?"

"That you will not put yourself under the influence of that thing at the Nickel Plate Saloon."

"You apply a rather harsh name to her, Diantha. I rather admired her, too, the little I saw of her. It was my intention to seek her acquaintance further."

"Yes, so I thought, by what you said when we came out, and it pained me greatly. She is not worthy of your lightest thought. I hope your heart has not gone out to her the same as mine has gone out to you."

The sport laughed.

"I can set your mind at rest on that point," he assured. "I think no more of her than I do of you, thus far."

"That gives me great comfort, I assure you, sir. I am not afraid to contest the matter with her. I can stand the test, no matter how severe; as for her—well, I leave you to learn for yourself."

"And is this all you want of me?"

"Are you in haste to get away from my company?"

"I am anxious to know the whole matter, while we are about it."

"Well, you have heard it all. You have heard my confession, you know my secret, and now my fate is in your hands."

"Which is thrusting a great responsibility upon me. However, even if I am not able to reciprocate your affection you will probably find that I am the less worthy of such devotion when you come to know me better."

"Never!" earnestly. "I love you for life, and for better or worse stand willing to link my fate with yours—"

"Willing to be known to the world as Mrs. High Horse? Hal hal hal!"

"I know you have another name than that."

"Perhaps I have."

At this point in their conversation the door opened and the dark-skinned woman, the fortune-teller, entered the room.

She glanced at them, but paid no further heed, and crossed over and sat down in a corner near one of the windows, where she rocked herself to and fro, looking out upon the street.

The High Horse rose to go.

"I am glad the interruption came no sooner," the woman remarked, in an undertone. "Do not forget."

"Hardly likely that I could forget," responded the sport, aloud. "Remember, though, I have pledged nothing and promised nothing; I leave you as free as when I came here at your bidding."

"I cannot complain, sir; good-night."

"Good-night."

With a bow the sport left the room, Dashing Diantha looking at the door for a

second or two after he had disappeared, a peculiar expression upon her face.

Then she turned abruptly to the fortune-teller.

"Are you the woman I have heard of as the fortune-teller who came by the stage to-night?" she asked.

"Yes, lady, I am," was the answer. "My name is Madame Madalene."

"I want you to tell my fortune."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"I prefer you would wait till the morning, lady, when my tent will have arrived and when, by the sunlight, I can read your hand so much more clearly."

"No, no, I cannot wait. If you are a true fortune-teller you can tell me some now, at least, and then to-morrow I will visit you at your tent and pay you for telling my fortune in full."

"But, I prefer, lady, that you would wait—"

"No, I cannot wait."

The fortune-teller faced her chair around, holding out her hand.

Dashing Diantha advanced and laid her right hand upon it, palm up, and waited for Madame Madalene to speak.

"Will the lady be offended at plain truths?" she asked.

"I ask nothing of the past," was the sharp answer; "I know that only too well. I want to know the future."

"The future, lady, is uncertain. It is also dark. I cannot read clearly in this poor light, however, so do not be depressed. Maybe there is something especial you would ask."

"Yes, there is: Tell me whether the man who just left this room is free to marry or not."

"How can I tell of him by looking at your hand, lady? Impossible!"

"Then you are no fortune-teller."

"Useless, then, for you to come to me, if you have no faith in me. I would not, at any rate, flatter you with false statements."

She had dropped Diantha's hand, and now she turned her chair back to its former position and looked out the window as before. That Dashing Diantha would learn no more then was certain.

"I will come to you to-morrow, Madame Madalene," she said, as she stepped back and turned to leave the room. "I beg your pardon for what I said hastily, and hope I have not offended. I was too hasty. By your action and words you have inspired my faith anew, and I doubt not you can reveal many things of importance."

The fortune-teller responded, and the woman sport took her leave. Madalene the Mysterious was sure of one customer at least.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HIGH HORSE IN HOT DEMAND.

ON the following morning the sport found a note at the hotel office when he went down.

He thought at once it must be from Dashing Diantha; but he was mistaken, for it was from her rival, Blushing Blanche, as he found upon glancing at the signature.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed, upon reading it. "This is growing a trifle too interesting, I am afraid. However, my lady, I'll obey your call and learn what you want. It can't be worse than that of last night."

The note ran thus:

"TO THE SPORT HIGH HORSE:—"

"Will you please come to my rooms over the Nickel Plate? I would like to see you to put you on your guard. You have made the acquaintance of one who is as poison as the asp. I would be your friend, would you but allow me the pleasant privilege."

"BLUSHING BLANCHE."

So, after the High Horse had breakfasted, he went over to the Nickel Plate to learn what was wanted.

The place did not look much as it had looked on the previous night. Only a few persons were there, and the saloon proper and the gaming-room were undergoing their daily cleaning.

There was a man behind the bar, and the High Horse applied to him.

"I want to find Blushing Blanche," he said.

"She won't be here till night again," was the brief answer given.

"I know; but, she has rooms over this saloon and is expecting me. Will you show me the way up?"

"Oh! that's a horse of another color. Why didn't you say so? Go to that last door on the left there, and pass right up."

Thanking him, the sport turned away to follow the directions he had received, and soon found himself at the head of a flight of stairs, where a closed door confronted him.

He knocked.

The door was presently unlocked and opened by a big colored woman.

"Who is you, an' what you want heah?" she demanded, placing herself squarely in his way.

"I want to see Blushing Blanche," the High Horse again explained. "I have received a note from her and I suppose she is expecting me."

"What's yo' name, sah?"

"High Horse."

"Yo' am de man she's 'spectin', sah; walk right in."

With that she stepped back promptly, throwing the door wide, and the sparkling sport entered.

He found himself in a hallway along the side of the building, in which some flowers were blooming and from which other doors opened.

The colored woman closed the door and locked it, after which she led the way along the mentioned hall to the furthest door, which she opened and where she made the announcement:

"Missus, de gen'man done come."

She stepped back, and the sport entered the room, hat in hand.

The room was in the front of the building, and was light and well furnished and homelike.

Blushing Blanche rose from her seat near one of the windows, as blushing as ever, and advanced to greet him with hand outstretched.

She was becomingly attired in a neat morning gown, and looked truly womanly here in her cozy surroundings. On the previous night her attire had suited her occupation.

"I am glad you have come, sir," she greeted.

"And I am not sorry," responded the sport, smiling, as he took her hand.

"Well, pray sit down here by the window and let us have a little chat. I will explain why I sent for you."

She placed a chair for him, resuming the one she herself had occupied, and the sport accepted the situation with his usual ease of manner, making himself at home.

"My note surprised you, I doubt not," the woman observed.

"Well, no, not very much," the response.

"No?" herself surprised.

"You see, I am almost past being surprised at anything."

"Oh, that is it, eh? Perhaps, then, you have no curiosity to learn why I sent for you."

"I have obeyed your summons, which ought to be a satisfactory answer to that, Blushing Blanche. I am now awaiting your pleasure, you see."

"You are a cool one, I must say."

"It pays to be cool."

"I don't doubt it. I wish I could appear more cool myself; maybe then I would not be called Red-face, and the like, by persons with whom I would not associate or have anything to do."

"You refer now to Dashing Diantha."

"You heard what she called me last night."

"And I admired the way you took her down, too."

"The day may come when I will not let her off so easily. Yes, I refer to her, and I referred to her in the note I sent you, too."

"So I thought. There is evidently no love between you and her."

"But a good deal of hate," the woman promptly added. "I despise her, and for that reason she is my enemy."

"You hold each other in about the same estimation, I find."

"I have no doubt she talked scandalously about me, no doubt of it at all. It is just like her."

"You speak about as complimentary of her as she did of you, so there is little room for envy on that account on either side. It is about an even thing between you, I think."

"I find you are disposed to defend and favor her."

"Not so, not so at all. I told her last night I thought no more of her than of you."

"Which is all you need to tell me to give me the point I was after. She has been throwing herself at you, and is jealous of me. She is silly."

"You certainly would not expect me to betray her confidence, were such the fact."

"I do not ask you whether it is so or not."

"Then no answer is needed. But, why have you sent for me? We are not coming at that very rapidly."

"My note ought to be its own explanation, now, sir. I sent for you to put you on your guard against one who would lure you to your death. No need now to mention her name."

"By giving me the sex you think you make it plain enough. Very well. Now, suppose she had said the same of you, which ought I to believe?"

"Believe neither, till you have proven which is the true and which the false, sir."

This was spoken in great earnestness of manner.

"Why have you taken this trouble to warn me against Dashing Diantha?" the sport made inquiry.

"Because I would be your friend. I took a strange interest in you the moment I saw you last night, and I hope you will not deny me the pleasure."

"Every man wants all the friends he can get," the sport rejoined. "I am always glad to add to my list, Blushing Blanche, and am proud to reckon you among the number."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

"Then there is a favor I would ask."

"What is that? I'll grant it if I can, I assure you beforehand."

"It is this: That you drop Dashing Diantha and have nothing to do with her. Her friends cannot be my friends."

"Now you are giving me contrary advice. In which am I to place my trust? and upon which am I to act?"

"Contrary?"

"Yes; you just told me to believe neither till I had proven one to be false. Suppose she had said the same, should I drop you with nothing further against you than that?"

"But, she is dangerous, positively dangerous."

"That is certainly very contrary to the manner she expressed toward me last evening, Blushing Blanche."

"I see, she has poisoned your mind against

me and you are determined to trust her and not me. Very well, go on; do not heed my warning; but when it is too late then you will know—"

"You wrong me, Blushing Blanche. I have just as much regard for you as for her, on short acquaintance."

"I would have you have the more for me, High Horse."

"Ha! that is it, eh?"

"Yes. You will pardon me for calling you by that name, but I know no other, as you are aware. Yes, I want your regard, for—"

"Well, for what?"

"Must I make the delicate confession?"

Her face had now become more flushed than was its wont, and her eyes sought the floor.

"You certainly will have to speak out if I am to understand you aright," said High Horse. "You have gone too far now to stop and leave me in uncertainty."

"Yes, yes, that is true; you might draw a wrong conclusion. I will bear the shame and make my humble confession. The fact is just this: You have taken possession of my heart, and I want—want you all to myself."

"Ha! that is the how of it, eh?"

"Yes, that is the truth."

"Then you—"

"Yes, I love you."

"Well, this is rushing matters, Blushing Blanche. What has led you to make love to me at such short notice?"

"I will tell you, simply and honestly: At first sight of you last night your face reminded me of some one I have seen before, and I loved you there and then."

"Then you had loved that person whom I resemble?"

"I do not know; I do not think so. It was more like a dream, more as though I had always loved you unknown."

"And you make haste to tell me—"

"Yes, yes, with the one purpose of keeping you from the wiles of that shameless thing."

The sparkling sport toyed with his side-whiskers while he stared at the floor in a very thoughtful manner. He was doing some hard thinking. What meant all this anyhow?

"And you seek my love in return?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes; eagerly, hungrily. I will save you from that wax-faced woman, or I will perish trying."

"Then you do not think me capable of saving myself, evidently."

"She might win you, if you allow her to exercise her devilish influence over you, sir."

"And maybe she would say the same of you. Now, would you care to know what I think about this matter of love, on general principles?"

"Yes, assuredly."

"Well, I think it is something beyond control, something which goes only where it is sent."

"Do I not know that, and only too well? Have you not the proof of it in my case? You are right when you say that."

"And further, man is so constituted that he likes to seek rather than to be sought, and the thing just out of reach is the thing he most desires."

"Do you hold that to be true?"

"I do."

"Then, by my confession, I suppose I have made my case hopeless."

"Who can tell? At the same time I do not hold out any encouragement to you, in the matter under consideration."

"Perhaps you already love another."

"I have loved more than once, Blushing Blanche."

"Will you answer one question, truthfully and honestly?"

"Yes, or not at all."

"Do you love Dashing Diantha?"

"I do not. Rest assured of that, lady."

"At least, it is something to know that, and I thank you for your frankness. I suppose our interview may as well come to an end," rising. "I have warned you, and you know my secret. I will open the door for you, sir, and Susan will show you out. I thank you for your visit, sincerely thank you, sir."

The sparkling sport responded, but he was bowed firmly to the door and there was no excuse for his remaining longer, so he went, much puzzled that he had been dismissed so abruptly.

On his part he was not satisfied with the visit at all. There was much more he would have said to this woman. But, then, he concluded, when he thought it all over, it was her woman's art; she wanted him eager to come again.

CHAPTER VII.

MAYOR BOB'S CHANGE OF BASE.

SOME TIME during the night a freighter had come into camp, bringing the belongings of Madame Madalene.

When the sun rose on this morning a tent was discovered a little aside from the main street, tenanted by several swarthy Gypsies, both male and female.

Their wagons stood behind the tent, their animals were tethered near by, and all appeared as much at home as though they had been there for weeks. And over the front entrance to the tent was the name—

MADAME MADALENE.

The news of this discovery was promptly carried to Mayor Bob Smith, and as soon as he had breakfasted the mayor set out to investigate.

On the way he fell in with Major King and invited him to accompany him, an invitation the major accepted.

"They tell me they have camped right down, without asking leave of anybody," the mayor complained, "and I'm goin' to see about et. Don't know as we want any sech critters hyer."

He had not been informed concerning the name on the tent.

"I don't see that they can do any harm, Bob," the mine-manager defended them. "We have some rough characters here that would be hard to beat; if these fellows are any worse they could never have reached here without being hanged. Wouldn't be too rough on them."

"All right, we'll size them up first and decide what to do with them afterwards."

When they turned the corner that brought them to the lot where the tent had been pitched, however, about the first thing to catch the eye was the name above the tent entrance.

"By glory," ejaculated Mayor Bob, "et's the company of that woman that's put up at the White House, King John. See her name there on the tent?"

"Yes, I see it, and you are right. Evidently they'll stay, eh?"

"They'll stay, major."

The pair went on to the tent, where they were met by a man who appeared to be the captain of the little band.

"How do?" the mayor greeted him, feeling to learn whether the fellow understood the language or not.

The man responded, with something of a foreign accent.

"Who is this hyer Madame Madalene?" the mayor asked, pointing to the name on the tent.

"She is our queen," the answer, with the accent we will not try to imitate. "She came here by stage yesterday. Be here at Romany camp by and by."

"All right; we'll drop around again, then. Make yourselves at home; you're welcome as long as you behave yourselves,

and as soon as you don't there will be a day of reckoning."

The mayor said it pleasantly, but he meant it all the same.

He and the major turned away.

As they turned again into the main street the mayor glanced upward, and there high above the camp the red banner on the tight wire greeted his gaze.

"Condemn it!" he grated. "There is that infernal red rag yet, King John, to worry me into a fever. Is it going to be impossible to get it down from thar? That offer of mine don't seem to fetch et."

"And I don't believe it will, either, Bob. There is only one way, that I am able to think of."

"And what way is that?"

"To put a force of men up there, drill Needle Point full of holes at the base, and blow the whole thing up with giant powder."

"Et wouldn't never do, fer nobody could tell which way the rocks would fly and et might do more damage hyer in the camp than we could repair in a month, to say nothin' about loss of life."

"I thought about that part of it, too. The result to be gained is scarcely worth the risk."

"I'll tell ye what we will do, by glory!"

"What is that?"

"We'll come and consult this hyer Madame Madalene when she opens fer business, and see what she can tell us."

"Not a bad idea at all, and you might be able to get a pointer of some kind. Still, as we do not admit that we are sons of Belial, why need we concern ourselves about it?"

"There's hoss sense in that, that's so; but you see I am mayor of the camp, and any dig at the camp hits me. That thing has got to come down from there, somehow; I have taken oath to et, and et won't do to take water on top of that, you know. Down et must come."

The mayor's decision was firm enough, but that did not bring the banner down. He lacked the plan.

It was about an hour later when he dropped around to the tent again.

He was alone, the major having gone to the mines.

The fortune-teller was in.

"Good-mornin'!" the mayor politely greeted. "I have come to see what you know about things in general and other things in particular."

He laid a coin on the little table before her as he spoke.

"I understand what you desire to know, sir," the woman spoke promptly. "You are much concerned about a banner which is flying above this camp of yours, and you desire to know how it came there; but more particularly how to get it down."

"You have hit et, by glory!" the mayor cried.

"Well, sit down, sir, and we will consider the matter. There are some things I can disclose, some that I can not; some that I may reveal, others which I must not. You will see, therefore, I do not promise anything. If you are not satisfied when I am done, take back your money."

"That's rather discouragin', fer a lead-off, Madame Madalene; but, no matter; let'er go, please."

The woman folded her hands on her lap, and partly closed her eyes in a dreamy way.

"The person who caused the wire to be placed up there, sir," she presently spoke, "was neither your friend nor your enemy. He will be one or the other before the wire is taken down. The message upon the banner is too plain to need any explanation. You know whether it refers to you or not. The wicked men of this camp may well tremble indeed."

"Is that all?"

The woman did not answer or move, but presently she resumed:

"There is a way to get the wire down, but I dare not reveal it at this time. To do so, would be to incur the displeasure of the one who has signed himself Satan. I dare not do that. Circumstances may come about so that I will be free to disclose the plan; if so, I will inform you. And this is all I may tell you now. It is certainly not worth the money you have paid, which I must beg you to take back again. Later, I may reveal more."

"Never mind the money," the mayor waived. "Keep that on account, anyhow. Do I understand you to say you know more about this wire business than you have told me?"

"It is true that I see more than I can now mention."

"Can't I buy that information?"

"Not at this time."

"I have made a standin' offer of a thousand dollars to the person who will tell me how to take that wire down."

"Were it ten times one thousand, sir, it would not tempt me. What I do not disclose for a simple fee, no amount of money can buy. Useless to offer: you would only waste words."

"That settles et, then. But, there is somethin' more I would ask you about. Maybe you can lighten me on that."

"Let me see your hand, please."

She held out her own small hand, and the mayor laid his great paw upon it completely hiding it from sight.

The woman looked at his palm carefully for some moments, when she said:

"All the indications are for long life, barring accidents. You are a man of determination; when you make up your mind to a thing it has got to be done if possible. Your mind is troubled by a mystery older than this of the tight wire over your camp, a mystery of blood—that is to say, of murder. Allow me to ask if I am right."

"You ar', by glory!"

"Yes," letting go his hand and reclining again in her chair, half closing her eyes in the same dreamy way, "I am right. I see it now; two men were murdered, mysteriously, and you have never been able to find out who committed the crime. Some person has been sent for, who might be able to aid in solving the riddle, but you have been told he cannot come at this time. Hence, you are in the dark, with no present prospect of clearing up this mystery."

"That's et, woman; that's it, by glory!"

"I cannot reveal to you the name of the murderer, of course. Things kept so secret are secrets even to seers. This I will tell you, however: The banner above this camp has especial reference to the murderer or murderers, and well may they tremble for their crime."

"See hyer, do you know this ter be the fact?"

"I would not tell you, were it not, sir."

"That settles et, then. Down comes that notice of reward I've posted, and things can take their own course, fer all of me."

"I cannot see that it will make any difference, sir, whether you offer a reward or not, but I can understand why you would take it down. It shows your earnest desire to have the first mystery solved."

"You ar' right; you hit et ker-slap! Ef that wire-walker is interested in findin' out who killed Wilson and Connor, I'll not put anything in his way, you bet! I say, though, Madame Madalene, can't you let me into who this chap Satan is? I'd like to work with him."

"Even did I know, sir, I could not disclose, for I should, as I said, incur his displeasure."

"All right; I won't press ye fer what you don't want to tell."

"Later, sir, I may be able to tell you a great deal more than at present. I hope you will take back the fee you have laid on the table; I have not earned it."

"Et's yourn now, woman, sartain sure et is; and, besides that, I'm a heap more obliged to you. You and your band ar' welcome to stay hyer jest as long as you want to, and ef anybody disturbs ye, let me know."

The woman thanked him, and he took his leave.

Going straight to the White House, he there tore down from the piazza the notice of reward he had posted.

As he was doing this the glittering sport, High Horse, came up, having just come from his call upon Blushing Blanche over the Nickel Plate, as related.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What doing, mayor?"

"Tearin' et down, as you see," the mayor responded, giving a final jerk.

"Why, what is that for? Changed your mind? I have been trying hard to earn that reward."

"Sorry, but the reward ain't a reward no longer, sport. I have come to the clusion that I went off at half-cock regardin' the matter, anyhow."

"What led you to change your mind?"

"Jest this: This hyer camp has got a sooperflooety of hard cases, and ef the Old Boy has come to make a cleanin' out I don't see as I'm called upon ter stand in his way. See it?"

"Hal ha! ha! Well, that's a new idea, sure enough. The threat certainly is not addressed to honest men, and now that you bring it to my notice I don't see myself why you should worry your head about it. It may be the means of causing an exodus of the bad characters."

"Causing a—who?"

"A getting up and dusting out on the part of some of your worst denizens."

"Jest so; now I get on to what you mean. On the whole, I don't see that I'm called on to set up on my hind legs and howl."

The sport laughed and passed on into the house, and the mayor turned in the same direction but caught sight of King John approaching him and stopped and waited for the manager to come up.

"Not taken down your notice?" the mayor asked.

"Yes, et's down. I ain't worryin' my head any further about et. Wave, blast ye, ef ye want to!" motioning toward the banner.

"Then you have seen the fortune-teller?" the mine-manager asked.

"Yes, I've seen her, major, and I've got a p'inter from her, too." And he told all about the interview.

"Good enough," the manager remarked, when he had heard. "If that is the case, that it's in the interest of solving the mystery of Connor and Wilson, I say with you—Let'er wave!"

"Yes, by glory, let'er flutter! And mebbey we'll pull through and git ther murderer without the help of Deadwood Richard after all. No harm to be doin' our level best till he gets hyer, anyhow, seein' that's what he told you to do in this letter."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH OF THESE IS GUILTY.

THE Mayor of Hard Knocks had been gone but a few minutes from the tent of the Gypsy fortune-teller when Dashing Diantha put in her appearance there.

She entered with a smile and the Gypsy greeted her pleasantly.

"You see I have come," the woman sport observed.

"Yes, you have kept your word, lady," the response.

"But I am not your first customer."

"No; I have had one other."

"I saw him; it was Mayor Smith. What in the world did he want here? I would not have thought him a believer in fortune-telling."

"You must pardon me, lady, but it would be a breach of trust to disclose what he came for. Suppose my next caller should demand to know what your errand was, ought I to tell?"

"No, decidedly not; I merely put into words the prompting of my curiosity at the moment, without thought. Now, Madame Madalene, I have come to have my own fortune told; and not exactly that, either; I know all about the past, and the future comes along plenty fast enough to satisfy me."

"Then there is some special point you would have me touch upon."

"There, that is it; you have hit it just right. There are, in fact, two or three such points."

"Then you have only to name them."

"Of course you can tell me no more about that gentleman now than you could last night."

"Him called High Horse?"

"Yes."

"No, I have had no meeting with him yet."

"If I could bring about such a meeting, so that you could get a look at his band, would you tell me?"

"As far as it might be for your own good, lady. I would not promise to reveal to you anything he might wish to hold secret. That would be unfair to him and of little good to you."

"I would not ask to know his secrets. I hinted last night what I wanted to know about him."

"Very well; bring about the meeting, as you suggest."

"I will do so, at the earliest possible opportunity. Now, for something else I would like to know."

"Name it."

"Some time ago there was a murder here, a double murder, in fact. I am eager to know who the wretch was who killed those men."

The Gypsy requested to be informed all about it, and the woman sport told of the matter in full, about as it has been made known to the reader. She withheld nothing, apparently, as far as she knew.

"You ask me a hard question, lady," the Gypsy said, when she had attended patiently to the end.

"I hope you do not mean to tell me you cannot answer it."

"You guess it aright; I can not."

"Why can you not?"

"For this reason: The murderer being unknown to me, and this a secret held as tightly as a secret can be held, it is impossible for my mind to gain the ascendancy sufficiently to penetrate the mystery. It is rendered doubly difficult, you observe."

"Well, can you tell me whether man or woman did it?"

"No, I cannot answer that, either."

"Then I am cheated all around. I hoped to learn the truth through you. One question more: Were the person in your presence could you guess the secret that person held?"

"It is possible that I might do that."

"You do not lay claim to being a perfect mind-reader, then?"

"Far from it; I am a simple fortune-teller, reading the character from the open palm."

"Suppose the palm of a murderer or murderer were shown you, would you know it at a glance? Could you read that in the hand?"

"If murder was the ruling passion of the person, yes; otherwise, no. If it was a deed on the spur of the moment, then the

palm would not reveal it any more than it would reveal any other passing deed."

"You at least lead me to believe you are no impostor, Madame Madalene."

"I should be sorry to have you regard me as such."

"Can you read a suspicion I have in mind?"

"I might venture a guess as to what it is."

"Do so."

"You suspect some person of the crime of which we have been talking."

"Hah! you have guessed aright. You are not so bad a mind-reader, after all. I do suspect a person of that crime."

"And you have mentioned it to no one."

"I have not. What I am coming at is this: If I reveal the name of that person to you, and she should come here to you, do you think you could then penetrate her secret?"

"You think the one who did the deed was a woman."

"I do, positively."

"Why have you not mentioned it before?"

"I have not the slightest proof with which to back up the charge were I to make it."

"Now I understand; and now to answer your question: I might be able to penetrate the secret, but that is not certain. If her mind happened to be the stronger, then useless to try."

"I see. I will tell you whom I suspect, and if you can be the means, in any way, of bringing the right person to account, you will win the regard of every right-minded person in the camp. You must be very sure you are right before you speak, however."

"Certainly; I would not point suspicion at any person unless very sure of my ground."

"Then you would expose the guilty one if you knew who it was?"

"I would be guilty myself not to do so."

"That is quite true."

"Now, who is the person?"

"It is a woman known here as Blushing Blanche. She is a gambler, and has a place in the Nickel Plate Saloon."

"What reason have you for thinking she did the deed?"

"She was jealous of me."

"Then these men were your lovers, or admirers?"

"Both were seeking my favor, and she was eager to win them away from me."

"And failing to do so, you think she took revenge upon you by killing them, I understand you to mean."

"Yes, that is it; but, mind, I have no proof that it is so, and would not make the charge openly for the world. I do not like the woman, but I would not so terribly wrong her."

"I fully appreciate your delicacy about the matter. You may depend on me not to breathe your suspicion unless positive proof falls into my hands. Should she come here I will try to learn whether or not you are right. Then you do not want your fortune told?"

"No, I guess not, for the reasons I gave you. Will you let me know what conclusion you come to?"

"Perhaps, but I do not promise that I will do so."

Soon after Dashing Diantha took leave.

Only a few minutes had she been gone when Blushing Blanche entered the fortune-teller's tent.

"Do you tell fortunes?" she inquired.

"Yes, lady," the Gypsy answered.

"Shall I tell yours?"

"I do not know that I care to have my fortune told, but there are some things I should like to know."

"Very well, I will answer your questions if I can. Will you allow me to look at your hand?"

The woman gambler gave her hand willingly.

Madame Madalene looked at the palm

steadily for a few moments, then let the hand go, saying:

"I have looked at worse hands than yours, lady. Now you may ask the questions you have in mind, though I do not promise to answer them. Maybe I shall not be able to do so."

"You do not pretend to know everything, then?"

"Far from it."

"Well, what can you tell me about the man who came by the same stage with you yesterday?"

"What do you desire to know about him?"

"Everything."

"That is broad and sweeping. I may as well say that I can tell you nothing about him, as I have had no opportunity for studying his hand since we came here."

"Should you have such opportunity, would you then tell me something regarding him?"

"Yes."

"Very well; I can wait. Now, something more: Have you heard about a double murder that was done here in this camp some time ago?"

"I have."

"Can you tell me who did the deed?"

"I will not deceive you or try to impose upon you; I can not tell you."

"Do you mean because you do not know? or because you do not want to tell me? Which is it?"

"Because I do not know, lady."

"Suppose I name a person whom I suspect, what then?"

"Are you interested in having the murderer discovered and punished for his crime?"

"I am, most emphatically. I have a suspicion, but no proof, and perhaps by mentioning my suspicion to you, you could learn whether it is well founded or not."

"Possibly I might."

"I will tell you, then, whom I suspect, though it is terrible to think her guilty of so great a crime. That person is the woman who was here with you a short time ago."

"Not Dashing Diantha, as she is called?"

"The same. But, understand, I have no proof; I dare not accuse her."

"Why should you suspect her? It does not seem possible that one so noble-appearing can be guilty of such a deed."

"She was jealous of me, for these men were paying me more or less attention, and I suspect that in a fit of jealous hatred of me she may have killed them to spite me."

The conversation as a whole was not greatly different from that between the Gypsy and Dashing Diantha only a short time before, and finally Blushing Blanche took her departure, leaving the Gypsy woman to ponder over the mystery of it all. It was certainly a puzzling affair.

CHAPTER IX.

SILLY GILLY'S SCHEME.

In the mean time the worthy mayor had been giving some further instructions to the people whom he governed.

Previously he had given orders that, should the wire-walker appear again, he was to be shot. Now he recalled that order, and commanded that no person should interfere with the mysterious masquerader.

A pretty close watch had been kept all along, but the funambulist had not appeared a second time, and it did not look likely that he would risk tempting a bullet from the crowd his red banner had so greatly incensed. It was believed that he was in the camp, but no man could point him out.

We have hinted at a suspicion that had struck the mayor forcibly at the time of the arrival of the stage on the previous night.

He had conceived the idea that maybe the High Horse, or Madame Madalene, was concerned in it.

Questioning the driver, Six-horse Sid, however, he had been obliged to give the idea up. Both passengers had come through, and hence it had been impossible that either could have been at the camp that morning.

It was along toward the dinner hour when the mayor and the sport High Horse were sitting on the hotel piazza.

They had been having a quite extended talk.

"By the way, mayor," the High Horse presently asked, "who is that fellow sitting over there in front of that little grog-shop?"

"That? Oh, that's only Gil Brookland, or Silly Gilly, as we call him. He is only about half baked, or a little more. The boys have fun with him sometimes. I'll call him if ye want to know him."

"I have noticed that he has been gazing at that banner up there since I got up this morning. I'd like to know what he's thinking about."

"We'll mighty soon find out, if he knows himself. I'll call him over and ask him."

"Hillo, there, Gilly?"

The fellow instantly lowered his gaze from the red banner on the wire and looked around to learn who had called him.

"Come over hyer," the mayor called, standing up and motioning to him. "Want to see you a minute. You'll git sun-baked thar; not that a little more bakin' would do ye any harm."

Those around laughed, and the silly fellow got up and started across to where the mayor and the sport sat.

He was a lanky, loose-jointed fellow, apparently twenty-five years of age, his face partly covered with a downy beard entirely innocent of the razor's touch. He was poorly clad, but evidently aimed to appear as well as possible.

"What do you want?" he humbly inquired, when he came up.

"This hyer gent wants to make your 'quaintance, that's all," the mayor explained. "Mr. High Horse, this hyer is Mr. Gilbert Brookland."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Brookland," the sport greeted, offering his hand.

The silly fellow gave his own hand timidly, laying it in that of the sport as though it had no life.

"Come sit down," the High Horse invited. "I want to talk with you. The mayor here tells me you are a pretty good sort of chap."

Silly Gilly took the proffered seat, saying nothing, however, and no sooner was he seated than his gaze returned to the red banner high up on the tight wire over the camp.

"Yes, he's a good fellow," the mayor substantiated. "The more ye see of him the more you'll like him, sport. He's moon-struck now, tryin' to see stars by daylight. What ar' ye thinkin' about, anyhow, Gilly? Ye seem to have somethin' powerful hefty on yer mind."

"That is just what I was going to ask him," said the sport. "Say, my friend, what are you thinking about?" touching his arm to draw his attention.

The silly fellow looked at the questioner.

"I'm makin' up a patent to get that flag down from thar," he answered, very soberly.

"The deuce ye ar'!" exclaimed the mayor. "What do ye want et down from thar for?"

"I want to earn the prize that's offered."

"Ho! that's it, 'hey?" with a wink at High Horse. "Well, how far have ye got along with yer patent?"

"I've got it all right, all but one thing," was the deliberate reply, and the speaker again turned his attention to the banner.

"All but one thing," he repeated.

"And what is that?" asked the sport.

"How to give the stone the second throw."

"What do ye mean by that?" demanded the mayor.

"Why, I'd tie a string to a stone, and throw the stone over the wire; but, no man could throw the stone over from the ground, and I don't know how to get a man half-way up to give it the second throw."

"He has struck the right idea, Mayor Smith, as sure as you live," cried the sport.

"I don't see et, ef he has. What's he gettin' at?"

"We'll draw him out further. Suppose you could get a string over the wire, Mr. Brookland, what would you do then?"

"Don't you see? The stone would bring it down on the other side, and then I could tie a rope to the string and pull that over, and a man could climb the rope and take down the flag."

"A darn good idea," cried the mayor; "a darn good idea, by glory! But, I'm like Gilly, I don't see how ther stone is to be throwed over in the first place. That is the sticker, I'm afraid. No use tryin' to think about puttin' a man up thar to give et a second throw, Gilly."

"That is what sticks me, Mr. Smith."

"And is that what you have been trying to plan out ever since morning?" asked the High Horse.

"Yes; but I don't see how to do it unless we build a tower for him to stand on, and that would take time and cost a heap o' money. And he can't stand up there on nothin'."

"Well, let me see if I can't help you out. Your idea is all right in the main, but the details bother you. Now, here are two ways out of the difficulty: One is, to shoot the string over the wire; the other, to climb up there to the base of what your people call Needle Point, and there throw it over."

"By glory!" ejaculated the mayor. "Why couldn't we think of that before?"

"We didn't buckle ourselves down to it the way this poor fellow has been doing," responded the sport.

"I opine you ar' right, but I'm blamed ef I thought I'd ever take points from Silly Gilly. You're best man, Gilly, I own."

The silly fellow looked pleased at this, and a look of great relief had come over his face. Now, evidently, he saw his way clear for his "patent."

"That's it!" he cried. "That is the way to do it! Now I'm going to win that prize, and then I'll have good clothes and a watch and chain, and then I'll bet I'll—"

"But, you're too late, Gilly," the mayor informed.

"Too late?" wonderingly.

"Yes; that reward ain't offered no more; I have changed my mind and I don't want the banner taken down now."

The look of disappointment that came over the poor fellow's face was terrible to witness, so sudden and so utterly hopeless it was, as though he had lost his last and best friend.

"But, you needn't take et so to heart," the mayor immediately tried to condole.

"You ar' a mighty good feller jest the same."

"I'll tell you what you might promise, mayor," suggested the sport.

"What is that, sport?"

"We won't mention his secret, and when you do want the banner taken down you can give him first chance."

The silly fellow's face brightened a little.

"Yes, that's what I'll do," the mayor promptly asserted. "When I want it down, Gilly, I'll give you first whack at it, and I'll pay you well, too. How will that do? Don't tell anybody."

"That will be all right; but, if I forget how it was to be done, will you help me remember?"

"Yes, I'll do that, too. You can run along, now; and you'd better keep out of the

sun. If you want to gaze at the wire, take the shade for it."

"Yes, sir; the sun wasn't there at first, and I didn't notice it when et kem, I was so busy thinkin'. It's all right now, though, and I'll try not to forgit how it is to be done."

With that he shambled off in the direction of the little saloon in front of which he had been sitting so patiently.

"He is a character," observed the sport.

"You ar' right he is. He's a fool and he ain't, jest as ye have a mind ter take him."

"So I perceived. It is strange, thinking out the main part of his idea, that he could not fill in the simple details. His idea was decidedly good."

"I don't know whether et's so strange or not, by glory! It didn't come ter me till you took a turn at et and showed me how et could be done. I knowed no mortal man could throw over the wire from hyer."

"But from up there on the ledge by the peak it could be done, and the incline of the wire would carry the string down to the middle, when it could be lowered and a rope drawn up. It would take a long string, and a long rope, but I suppose the camp could supply both."

"Oh, yes; but the way it stands now I don't care a prickly p'ar whether the thing comes down or not."

"I understand. But, about this fellow Gilly; why does he crave good clothes and a watch?"

"Ha! ha! Why, he's stuck on Blushin' Blanche, and thinks if he was togged out he might win her. Et was quite a joke some time ago, till she run him off at the p'int of a revolver. Sence then he ain't been so 'tentive to her."

"That is the case, eh? Well, if he likes that style of beauty I can't condemn his choice. Shows his good taste in such matters, anyhow. The poor fellow evidently can't realize how hopeless his case is in that direction; doesn't seem to know he is not quite the man for the occasion."

CHAPTER X.

HIGH HORSE'S HAND SHOWN.

ALL during that day Madame Madalene was kept busy, and she reaped quite a golden harvest in trifling fees for her services.

A great number of persons had their fortunes told, while others applied for bits of especial information, and many were led to marvel at the woman's wide range of occult knowledge.

Many were reminded of events of the past, in some instances secrets which they had carefully guarded, and so it was that before night the fortune-teller was well advertised and her fame as a seer was broadly acknowledged. If she could open up the past as she did, why could she not as well reveal the future?

That was the question put to those who doubted her power by those who fully believed in it, and it was a clincher.

There were many denizens of the camp who could not be prevailed upon to go near her.

Of course they had reasons, and kept them, too.

Let us not question them.

It was shortly after tea when Dashing Diantha joined the sport High Horse on the White House piazza.

The sport was smoking a cigar and enjoying the evening air.

He made a motion to throw the weed away as the woman approached, but she detained him.

"No, don't do that, sir," she said quickly, raising her hand to check him. "I rather enjoy the smoke of a good cigar."

"Thank you," he acknowledged. "Will you take a seat and enjoy with me this cool breath of air that is just beginning to flow in from over the mountain tops?"

"With pleasure. And the enjoyment will not be confined to the aroma of your cigar and the delightful air, I assure you."

She took a seat near him.

"I notice the offending banner still waves," she made remark, after the sport had responded to her last observation. "And the mayor has taken down his offer of reward, too."

"Yes; he has thought better of it, he tells me. If Satan wants his own, he does not see that he ought to interfere, since it might be a benefit to the camp if the Old Boy should gather in a few of his disciples. Anyhow, he has changed his mind about taking down the banner."

"Perhaps because he could think of no plan by which to get it down, eh?"

"Oh, no, he has the plan all right now; his reason is about as I have told you, though I put it figuratively."

"He has thought of a plan, you say?"

"I did not say he thought of it himself, but he has a plan that would work."

"Do tell me what it is, for you have greatly aroused my curiosity. Who was the author of it? It seemed quite a puzzle."

"Yes, so it was, but it was thought out by one of your worthy citizens here, a man of considerable brain. They say his name is Gilbert Brookland, I believe."

"Not Silly Gilly!"

"So they call him; but the fellow has a deeper mind than they give him credit for having."

"Well I never! Who would have supposed he could ever think of a plan to get the banner down? Why, he never seemed to know enough to go in out of the rain!"

"He certainly lacks a button somewhere," the sport admitted, "but I fail to find just where it is. I guess he must have too much brain for his head, and yet his head is not a small one, either."

"True. But, what led the mayor to change his mind?"

"Well, he paid a visit to the Gypsy fortune-teller, I believe, and she told him something he did not know."

"Indeed! Do you know what it was?"

"Something to the effect that the one who put the banner up is interested in hunting out the murderer of those two men who were killed here some time ago."

"Is it possible! Then I am glad the mayor has decided to let it remain, for I should like to see that mystery cleared up. But, by the way, have you been to see that wonderful woman yet?"

"No, I have not."

"You ought to go, by all means."

"Why?"

"You would be interested, I know. She is wonderful."

"Then you have been to see her yourself, I take it. I hope your future is to be bright."

"The fact of the matter is, she told me only enough to make me desire to know more, but she certainly can read the future, as a good many willingly attest."

"I have little faith in such characters."

"Were you to visit her you might change your mind."

"Perhaps."

"Dare you go and see her?"

"I see no reason why I should fear to do so, Dashing Diantha."

"Pardon me, the words I used had no significance. How would you like to go with me and pay her a visit now?"

"Why, I'll accompany you, certainly, if you desire it. Anything to kill time; and I don't see that I can dispose of the present in any more pleasant way than in your company."

"Thank you," she cried in her gushing way.

They rose and passed down the steps, and turned up the street.

The sport had noticed, without appearing

to do so, that Blushing Blanche was at a window of her room across the way.

Now as the pair started up the street, Dashing Diantha turned her head and glanced in the direction of the Nickel Plate, and catching sight of her rival, gave her head a sneering toss.

High Horse was taking it all in, though the woman had no suspicion that he noticed it.

The woman was well-attired and appeared at her best, and they were a striking couple, drawing attention from every side as they advanced.

Said one man:

"Dashin' Dianthy seems ter have got her clam-stake druv home on ther sport, an' I reckon Blushin' Blanche ain't in et this hyer time. Mebby thar'll be fun, 'fore et's done with, fer ther sport looks like a rich strike an' they'll both want him I don't doubt."

In all of which the group around the speaker heartily acquiesced.

The High Horse and his companion went on, unmindful of the attention they attracted to themselves, the woman chatting away as only a woman can.

Finally they arrived at the Gypsy's tent.

There was quite a crowd of curious persons outside, but no one was within at the moment.

Way was made for the sport and his companion as they came near, and they entered, finding Madame Madalene there as if patiently waiting for their coming.

"I have come to see you again, Madame Madalene," said Dashing Diantha, cheerfully. "And I have brought this gentleman with me. Sport, Madame Madalene."

"Pleased to know you, madame," the sport greeted.

"What name did I understand?" the Gypsy asked, as she acknowledged the introduction.

"I am called High Horse, the only name I have at present," the sport quickly explained, to save Dashing Diantha any trouble in the matter.

"A strange name, but not unlike this wild country. What is your pleasure, lady?" turning to the woman sport.

"Why, my friend has little faith in fortune-tellers, and I have prevailed upon him to come to you and be convinced that there is something in your mystic power. I hope you can convert him, madam."

"That I cannot promise to do. Will you allow me to look in your hand, sir?"

"Certainly; investigate at your pleasure."

He extended his hand and laid it on the table before her, palm up.

She studied it for a moment.

"I read a heart of oak, a will of iron, and a nerve of steel," she quietly announced. "In the past have been many troubles, many trials. Here and there a ray of happiness is discerned."

With that she paused.

The sport smiled in a careless manner.

"You see she gives me quite a flattering send-off," he remarked to Dashing Diantha. "Can you wonder that I have little faith in her kind?"

"Indeed, I am convinced that she has spoken the truth," the woman answered, a look of admiration beaming in her eyes. "Your appearance certainly indicates all she has said of you."

"Your opinion in the matter is biased, you must remember."

Their eyes met for the moment, and the woman's face assumed just a tinge of color.

Madame Madalene was apparently paying no attention to this, but was still gazing steadily at the sport's hand, and now she resumed:

"You are a friend to friends, but a foe most terrible to foes. Your weight has ever been thrown in the balance on the side of right and justice. Honor is one of

your strongest points; your word is your bond. Happy the man who calls you friend; more happy the woman whom you love."

The sport still smiled as though carelessly, while the tinge on the face of Dashing Diantha had slightly deepened.

"Isn't that a certificate to be proud of?" the High Horse demanded. "What is to hinder me from disbelieving such nonsense? You had better cut it short, I think, Madame Madalene."

"As the gentleman pleases," the fortune-teller obeyed, withdrawing her gaze from his hand. "The lady is right, though," she added: "every word I have spoken is true. Proud and happy the woman who has your love. I could tell you much, sir, but I would do so only in private."

"Thank you, but that is about all I care to hear," the careless response.

"You would do well to call upon me again, sir, coming alone. What I would disclose should not be heard by other ears."

"Well, I'll think about it, madame, and maybe some day I'll drop in to learn the color of her eyes and hair and the middle letter of her front name, or something of the sort."

"You are cruel to jest," Diantha chided. "Madame Madalene might be of great service to you if you do not offend her."

"He does not offend, lady," the Gypsy hastened to assure.

"Shall we now go?" the sport asked.

"Yes, we may as well."

So, after a moment or two of final chat, they took leave of the Gypsy queen, returning in the direction of the hotel, talking about the experience.

CHAPTER XI.

DASHING DIANTHA DESPERATE.

SCARCELY sooner had these two turned the corner, than another woman came out from the rear of the fortune-teller's tent and hurriedly entered.

It was Blushing Blanche, who had followed them after they had passed the Nickel Plate, and who had been waiting, out of sight, for them to come out; and not only waiting, but straining her ears to hear.

Madame Madalene glanced up as she entered, but did not appear at all surprised at seeing her.

"You can tell me something now?" Blushing Blanche asked, hurriedly.

"Yes, lady, I can tell you something now," the reply.

"About him?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me, I pray."

"First tell me what you most desire to know."

"Well, is he a married man? Is there any woman in the world he loves?"

"Yes, to both your questions, lady. He is married, and he faithfully loves his wife—or so she fully believes."

A look of disappointment came for a moment over the face of the woman gambler, but it soon passed.

"And what of the other matter?" she asked. "Do you think the woman was the person who committed that awful crime?"

"As to that I cannot say, yet. I had no further talk with her that could reveal anything. I am inclined, however, to hold her innocent."

The same look of disappointment appeared again, and this time it was not so quick to vanish. Blushing Blanche had evidently been well satisfied in her own mind that Dashing Diantha was guilty.

"But, you have no proof of her innocence?" he asked.

"No, no proof," was admitted. "It is only my impression."

"And will you tell me what has given you that impression in her favor?"

"Simply that I cannot suspect her of so great a crime any more than I could suspect you."

"Heavens! you do not think I did it!"

"Not at all. I know not who did it; but, it would be just as reasonable for me to suspect you as her."

"I suppose you are right, but still I am not convinced. Nothing but the very proof of her innocence will ever convince me. Do not give up the thought, but test it at the first opportunity."

"Perhaps I will do so. Is there anything further you would care to ask me about the man?"

"Yes, there is, madam."

"Let me hear it, then, for I was about closing for the day and going to the hotel when you came in."

"I would ask this: Do you think by his manner that he cares greatly for that brazen Dashing Diantha? Do you think she has won his regard?"

"I am sure she has not. Have I not told you he is faithful to the woman of his choice? Do not further waste your time upon him, for you have nothing to gain by so doing."

"His faithfulness does not appear to the best advantage, as you must admit, going around with this Dashing Diantha as he is doing."

"It is she who is to blame in that, lady."

"Which is no excuse for him."

"Maybe not."

The Gypsy had been preparing to leave the tent, while speaking, and now she was ready to go.

"I will not question it further," Blushing Blanche said. "Time will tell how faithful he will be. I do not believe he is any exception to the rule, as men go."

"No, I do not imagine he is," the fortune-teller rejoined; "but, like our own sex, there are bad and good among them, and I think this sport High Horse is as decent a specimen as you are likely to find."

"Are you going in the direction of the hotel, Madame Madalene?"

"Yes, I am going to the hotel, lady."

"Then if you do not mind we will walk that way together. My rooms are over the Nickel Plate, just across the way— But, you know, of course."

The Gypsy made response, and they left the tent and passed out to the street, talking together.

And so they continued to the hotel, where they parted.

By this time Dashing Diantha and the High Horse had been there a little while, and had resumed their seats on the piazza.

As Madame Madalene and Blushing Blanche parted at the corner of the piazza, Dashing Diantha was addressing the sport in her most gushing manner, purposely to tantalize her rival, as it would seem.

"The shameless creature," she remarked to the High Horse. "She must have followed us, for I am sure I saw her in her room when we left the piazza to go and see the Gypsy. She has been there to find out what she could about us, no doubt. How I hate her!"

"You may be right," the sport admitted.

"But, then, what harm done? She has not been able to learn anything to our discredit, I am sure."

"Not to yours, certainly. But, I'll be even with her. Excuse me for a moment and I'll ask the Gypsy what she wanted."

She rose quickly and went off, the sport looking after her, a smile curling his lip.

Madame Madalene had stopped in the hall, but was now going up stairs.

"Just a word with you?" the woman sport requested.

"Certainly, lady," the Gypsy civilly responded, and she turned and came down to the foot of the stairs.

"Well, you have seen his hand; what have you to tell me?"

Dashing Diantha put the question eagerly, in low tones.

"You heard what I said to him; all of that was for your ears as well."

"As I supposed. You spoke of his love; does he love any woman? Is his heart already taken?"

"Yes, another than you possesses his love; he is not free, and it were better for your own happiness to drop him at once."

"Never! He may love, but that does not say I cannot win his love to myself. At any rate I mean to try. But, about that creature, Blushing Blanche; she has been to you."

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"I cannot believe her guilty of the crime."

The woman sport looked puzzled at this, as if she did not think it possible that Blushing Blanche could be innocent of the murder of Wilson and Connor.

"Then do you know her to be innocent?" she asked.

"No, I cannot say; but, I can believe it of her no more than I could believe it of you."

"But, you have no proof."

"I have no proof."

"Then I am not satisfied with your simple opinion in the matter. I still hold my own views of the matter, but I dare not express them, of course."

"Why dare you not make your suspicion known? It would do no harm, if the woman is innocent."

"She might, for all I know, hold the same suspicion against me."

"Then it were better to keep still."

"So I think."

Dashing Diantha passed out to the piazza again, while the Gypsy returned upstairs.

"What satisfaction did you get?" the High Horse asked.

"But very little, sir. She will not reveal the secrets of her clients, it seems."

"Which is quite right and proper, I should say. You would not want her to tell your secrets to Blushing Blanche, and you must look at it from her point of view as well as from yours."

"Yes, true enough; and we may as well drop it. But, there is one thing I am going to demand of you."

"And pray what is that?"

"You have been jesting about what the Gypsy told you."

"Yes, assuredly. Do you take me for such an angel of perfection as she pictured me?"

"I do; I believe all she said; and what I am going to ask you now is this: Is your heart given to another? Are you a married man?"

"Ha! ha! Now I'll tell you just what to do to satisfy yourself upon that point, Dashing Diantha; you have such perfect confidence in this woman, suppose you go and ask her."

"How provoking of you!"

"I am perfectly fair, and perfectly willing to rest the case with her."

"But, why will you not tell me yourself? Let me have the truth, whatever it may be. Anything is better than suspense."

"You are not inclined to take my word, though. When I scoff at what the woman told me in your hearing, you take her word against mine, so that is the use of my speaking?"

"Worse than ever. You are determined to make me desperate, I see. Suppose I ask her and she says you are already married?"

"Then your implicit confidence in her will be sufficient. Whether she tells you I'm free or not, take her word for it and act accordingly. That is the best advice I can offer you."

"But, one must be true, the other false."

"You cannot doubt her word, evidently; believe what she tells you and act upon it."

The eyes of the woman sport flashed dangerously for a moment.

"You must not forget that I am a woman," she warned, in a tone of suppressed emotion, real or feigned. "There is danger that my love might turn to hate, and you know what the poet says about a woman scorned."

"If I told you the truth would you believe me?"

"Yes, if it suited me to believe."

"So I thought."

"You see, you have made me almost desperate. Tell me the truth, on your word of honor."

"On my word of honor, then, I am not free, but a married man. I love my wife dearly, and no other woman. You have to admit that I have not sought you."

"So, that is the truth, is it?" the woman sport rejoined. "Well, so be it; I am as determined as ever to win you if I can. I will make you love me in spite of yourself, Sir High Horse!"

Her face, severe while she was speaking, softened immediately when she had done, and smiling sweetly, she tossed a kiss to him from her finger-tips and entered the house, leaving the sport to gaze after her; while from across the way Blushing Blanche was watching the performance.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLUE BEYOND REACH.

"WELL, here's a state of things, truly," the sport mused. "She is going to have me in spite of myself, is she? We'll have to see about that, my lady. If the words of that Gypsy are true, that I have a wife somewhere. I think she had better put in her appearance to defend her claim. Ha! ha!"

He laughed lightly to himself, but he was serious nevertheless.

"It strikes me there must be just a tinge of insanity about her," he further reflected. "And yet it does not appear very pronounced, either. I hardly know what to make of her. That she is dangerous is positive; I must be on my guard against her. I see good reason to suspect her of the killing of those men, Connor and Wilson. Still there is Blushing Blanche, too."

The sport was thoughtful, for he did not know which of the two merited his suspicion most.

"I'll take good care not to give either of them a chance at me," he decided, finally. "They are rivals, hating each other most heartily, and there is no knowing what desperate things they are capable of doing. Dashing Diantha seems to be particularly dangerous, but Blushing Blanche may be fully as bad when thoroughly aroused. I think I had better let them both understand for once and all that I am not on the matrimonial market; that may put a stop to their foolishness."

Getting up from his seat he lighted a fresh cigar, and was on the point of descending the steps when a hand detained him.

The High Horse had heard no one approach, and turned like a flash. Any person who could steal upon him like that was dangerous, and as he turned his hand fell upon a weapon.

What was his surprise, though, to find himself confronted with the half-idiotic face of the harmless half-wit, Silly Gilly.

"Well, what do you want?" the sport asked, his tone in no wise betraying the slight start the hand upon his arm had caused him inwardly.

"Here is a paper I was told to bring to you," the fellow answered, extending his hand with a small folded paper between his fingers as he said so.

The sport took it.

"Where did you come from?" he demanded.

"I got up on the end of porch there, sir," the explanation.

"You were mighty still about it."

"I've got on soft shoes."

High Horse opened the note and read it. It was written in a miserable scrawl, and read like this:

"To High Horse—

"SUR—You hav got to stay way frum Blushun Blansh, or you will git the same fait Connor and wilson got. This aint foolin—it means biznuss—and don't you furgit it—

"YOUR WURST FO."

"Where did you get this?" the sport demanded, as soon as he had mastered the contents of the missive.

"I was told to bring et to you," was the answer, "an' I was told not to tell or I would git a bullet in my head if I did."

With that the fellow turned away and started to go.

"Hold on!" the High Horse ordered; "I'm not done with you yet. Was it a man or a woman who sent this to me?"

"I can't tell you nothin', sir; I'll be killed if I do, sure."

The sport whipped out a revolver.

"You'll be killed if you don't, that's as sure as you are born!" he declared. "Come, now, I want to know all about this. You tell me who sent this note, and I'll see to it that no harm comes to you."

The fellow was holding out his hands and averting his face, with both eyes tight shut, as though he could ward off a bullet, and now he began to cry.

"I can't tell! I can't tell!" he whined. "It'll be death if I do, and I am sure of it. Please don't kill me; I ain't done no harm bringin' it to you, and I got half a dollar fer et, which I needed as bad as anybody. Please don't shoot, sir, but let me go."

He had now ventured to open one eye to see what the prospect was.

The High Horse laid hold upon his shoulder with his right hand with a grip that made the fellow squirm with pain, at the same time placing the tube of his revolver against his forehead.

"You can take your choice," he cried. "Tell what I want to know, or take a dose of medicine that will prepare you for burial."

The face of the miserable fellow grew deathly, and he keeled over in a dead faint.

"Hillo! Hillo! What's all this hyer about?"

So cried Mayor Bob Smith, as he came running out, his attention drawn by the sport's high words.

Others, too, were running to the scene, eager to learn what it all meant, and the sport let go his hold upon the silly fellow and allowed him to drop to the floor, in a heap.

"The flabby gosling!" he cried in disgust. "He has gone off in a faint, at the touch of a revolver."

"But, what was et about?" demanded the mayor. "What did ye have ter draw on him fer, sport?"

"Why he just brought me a mysterious message, and I was trying to force him to tell me who sent it, that was all."

"A message!"

"Yes," and the sport read it aloud.

"By glory!" exclaimed the mayor, excitedly. "That's worth knowin', hang me ef et ain't!"

"You are right," the High Horse averred. "I was determined to force it out of him, for it is plain that this note came from the murderer of Wilson and Connor."

"As plain as day. Git a rope, boys, and I'll see ef I can't scare et out of him when he comes to. This ain't no thing ter trifle about, and we hev got to push et while ther trail is warm."

"You bet!" cried the crowd.

Quite a crowd had by this time gathered, and it was being rapidly augmented.

Some men set off to find a rope, while others set about bringing the foolish fellow out of his faint to undergo a worse ordeal.

Women, too, had run out to learn what was going on, among them Dashing Diantha and Madame Madalene, and as each new arrival was eager to learn what was the matter the word passed from lip to lip.

By the time the rope was brought Silly Gilly was coming to.

The sport had now stepped aside, and was allowing the mayor to take full control.

Nothing was said until the foolish fellow was able to get up, which he did in a frightened way, staring at the crowd around him.

"Now, Silly Gilly, see hyer," the mayor cried. "Do you see this hyer rope? Wull, hyer's a noose in ther eend of et that will jest fit your neck, and onless you tell us who sent ye with that message to ther sport, we'll try et on ye."

The fellow shivered, and his teeth fairly chattered with fright.

"I'll be killed anyhow, I'll be killed anyhow," he whined. "I promised I wouldn't tell, and I won't; I'll be killed anyhow if I do."

"Put on ther halter," the mayor severely ordered. "Put on ther halter, and we'll see whether he won't tell. Ef he won't we'll hang him, fer et won't be much loss to ther camp anyhow."

Silly Gilly was seized and the noose was forced over his head, but at its touch he went off into another faint and hung limp and lifeless in the hands of his captors.

"I guess it's no use," spoke up the High Horse. "No use torturing the man, for he is likely to die on your hands, I should think."

"Et looks like et," the mayor decided. "Et ain't like as if he was a man with a hard head like the rest of us. We'll have to git at et in some other way, I guess."

"Can you think of any other way?" the High Horse asked.

The mayor studied a moment.

"Yes, I think I can," he declared.

"Well, what is your plan?"

"We'll get Blushin' Blanche to try and worm it out of him in confidence."

"Do you think she can do it?"

"Ef anybody kin. He is stuck on her, as I have told ye, and he would tell her anything, I guess."

The sport was thoughtful for some seconds, turning something over in his mind, evidently. Presently he appeared to have digested it to his satisfaction.

"The woman might object," he spoke next.

"She might, but I don't believe she would," responded the mayor. "She is as anxious as anybody ter have et cleared up."

"The murder mystery, you mean?"

"To be sure; ain't that what we're talking about?"

"Well, there is no harm in trying the experiment, anyhow. Let the fellow go, since he is of no use to us further."

"Yes, let him go," the mayor ordered.

"He has been scared out of his appetite fer a month ter come, I should say, anyhow. Ha! ha! Et was too much fer his rattled head ter stand."

"Can he read and write?" asked High Horse.

"No, he don't know anything," the mayor declared.

"Then he could not know the import of the message he was carrying. But, he appears to be a fellow of some grit, withal. He decided that it would be only death anyhow, and he might as well be hanged as killed otherwise. He wouldn't betray the one who sent him."

"That's so; never seen him show grit like that before."

"It is just possible that the one who sent

him is a friend whom he would not want to betray, don't you think so?"

"Well, that does look reasonable, fer a fact; but, blame me if I knowed he had such a friend in the hull camp. No, that can't be it, High Horse; et must be fear, jest as he said."

"Well, you know best about that, of course; I'm a stranger here. But, who will see the lady about this matter? I was just going over there when this fellow gave me the note; shall I speak to her about it, mayor, and see if she'll take the fellow in hand?"

"Yes, if ye want to ye kin, sport; et don't make any difference who."

"All right, then; I'll attend to it."

The High Horse had noted that Blushing Blanche was leaning from one of the windows of her front room over the Nickel Plate, taking in the scene, though it was not likely that she could hear what was said, in such a Babel as now prevailed, and the excitement being about over, he walked leisurely over to the Nickel Plate and entered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HIGH HORSE TAKES HOLD.

THE crowd soon melted away, and Silly Gilly coming in again, made his way off to the little third-rate saloon where he usually put in his time.

One idea which had entered the mind of the High Horse had been dashed, upon his learning that the silly fellow could not read or write. The clue he held seemed to be positively beyond reach.

But, the idea suggested by the mayor was a good one, and it might be the means by which the desired end could be reached, if properly worked. So, the sport entered the saloon with the intention of sending at once to Blushing Blanche and asking a private interview.

About the same time that he entered the main door, however, the negress, Susan, came into the room by the rear way.

She came straight forward to him, and said:

"De missus done want see you, sah."

"I have come on purpose to see her," said the High Horse in response. "Will you please ask her to come down here?"

"But, sah, she done want you to come up to her room."

"I cannot do so at this time. Tell her I will explain when she comes down, and I think it will be satisfactory. I will sit down here and wait for her. I have plenty of time."

The colored woman looked at him in a puzzled way, remarking that she did not know whether her mistress would agree to such an arrangement or not, and went off to report, while the sport took a seat in a retired corner of the carpeted portion of the saloon. He had not long to wait.

Blushing Blanche soon came down and joined him.

"I hardly knew whether to come to you or not," she greeted him, "since you refused to come to me."

"For which I humbly crave your pardon," said the sport. "If you read this, however, you will understand my reason and I think you will freely pardon me."

He put in her hand the note he had received from Silly Gilly.

While she read it he watched her face narrowly, and saw that a frightened expression came over it.

She looked up, as soon as she had deciphered it, their eyes met, and for the space of a moment neither spoke. The woman was the first to do so.

"Now I understand what I was going to ask you about," she said. "I wanted to know what was the trouble between you and Silly Gilly. It was he who gave you this,

and you were trying to force him to tell where he had got it."

"You guess aright."

"And could you not make him tell? I could not hear what was said, everybody talking at once."

"No; the fellow fainted, and there was no use trying to get anything out of him. He had been threatened with death if he told. Have you any idea who the author can be?"

"Not the slightest, unless it's Dashing Diantha."

"But, surely she would never write such a scrawl as this, would she?"

"Do you suppose for a moment she would write it in her own hand and manner of wording?"

"That is so, too; but, is she the only person you can think of who has reason, to write me such a note?"

"The only one, sir."

"Well, you are in position to know, and I'll have to take your word for it. Now, how are we going to find out whether she really did send it or not?"

"I know of no one else at all, sir."

"But, my question?"

"I am at a loss to offer any suggestion."

"Well, here is one that has been made by the mayor, and it may be a good one if you will take it in hand."

"Let me hear what it is."

"It is said that this foolish fellow has his mind set upon you, and that you have had to deal with him pretty severely in order to make him cease his attentions toward you."

"Yes, the idiot! that is so."

"Suppose you were to yield toward him just a little, don't you think you could lead him to confess to you who gave him the note?"

"I should be almost afraid to do so," the woman made response, after a moment of thought. "I had a hard time shaking him off before, and he is just silly enough to be dangerous."

"But, you need not fear him; some one could watch him for you."

"I think it a great deal better to keep him where he is, and not notice him at all."

"Then we are balked. The mayor hoped to get at the truth with your help, and desired me to speak to you about it. But, you know best, of course."

"I am sorry to disappoint him, but you can see how it is. If you could prevail upon him to go to Madam Madalene to have his fortune told, she might be able to draw him out; but I have heard the boys saying he will not go near her."

"Hardly likely she could do anything with him, unless she could really read his thoughts. For myself I have little faith in her power."

"And this was all you wanted to see me for?"

"Yes; but, had you anything more in mind when you sent your woman to ask me to come up to your room?"

"Well, yes, I had. I was watching my rival while you and she were talking on the hotel piazza, and I know that something important was passing between you. Something she did not like very well."

"Yes?"

"I am not asking you what it was, but I want to say this: I have taken all the insults from that woman I am going to stand. The sneering look she cast when she threw that kiss to you was the last straw. If you think anything of her, pray warn her."

"But, I think no more of her than of you, Blushing Blanche. And, now that I am reminded of it, there was something else I wanted to see you about besides the mayor's proposition."

"What was it?"

"I must tell you in plainest language. Dashing Diantha urged the matter, and I told her truthfully that I am not free to receive her attentions—or yours; that I am a married man and that I love my wife dearly. This on my word of honor, and you must admit that I have done nothing to lead you or her to think me otherwise."

"So, that was what cut my lady, was it?"

"Yes."

"And how did she take it? What did she say to that, when you told her?"

"I may as well tell you, I suppose. She declares she is determined to make me love her in spite of myself."

"Oh! is she, indeed! Maybe some one else will have something to say about it. You are here without your wife, and I would not trust husband of mine further than I could see him. Dashing Diantha must not forget that I am her rival."

She said it in a grimly determined tone.

"You now know the situation just as it is," the sport spoke as firmly. "You see that I cannot further receive the attentions from you or her which you have both been forcing upon me. You have neither anything to gain, and while I do not think you are sincere, you had better let me drop."

"Maybe I would do so, were it not for Dashing Diantha. I will not yield one inch to her. If she is determined to win your love, so am I, and it remains to be seen which of us will succeed."

"It will be neither."

"Then so be it; that will be gain for neither one. That woman has robbed me of love before, and I swear she shall never do it again."

The High Horse looked at her in a thoughtful manner.

Was this the person, he asked himself, who had sent the note by the foolish fellow?

There was good reason for him to suspect it. If he could not read, she could safely trust him, and the wording of the note was such as to turn suspicion away from her and toward Dashing Diantha.

And if he was right in the idea, it followed that she was the murderess of the men Connor and Wilson, as Diantha had charged!

It was a complex affair, looking at it from any point of view, but this view, for many reasons looked most reasonable of any.

Silly Gilly certainly would not betray her secret if he loved her, as was the common report and which the woman herself admitted; and unable to read, as said, there was nothing to fear from his learning what the note contained. And even could he have read it he would not have been able to see through it, for, from that point of view, it was doubly deep.

"I tell you again," he said finally, as he rose to go, "there is nothing for either of you to gain, so far as I am concerned, and you may as well cease your rivalry at once. And, it will be only prudent anyhow, in the face of this mysterious warning," he added, "to keep at a respectful distance from you, Blushing Blanche. That I shall take good care to do."

He said this to show her that her weapon had turned against herself, if she was the writer of the warning.

"That is only a prudent step, one which I cannot blame you for," she rejoined immediately. "It will all depend upon that thing, Dashing Diantha. If she will drop the idea, I will."

This knocked the suspicion, if she spoke sincerely, but who could say whether she did or not.

"Then I sincerely hope she will drop it."

And so ending the interview, the sport touched his hat and went from the place.

Returning to the hotel he there reported the result to the mayor, and they talked the whole matter over at length.

While they were still conversing King John joined them.

"I forgot to tell you, Bob," he said, "that I have heard again from that detective, Deadwood Dick."

"Ha! is that so? Well, what does he have to say this time?"

"Why, he writes to ask if the mystery is still on, saying he can come at a certain date if needed. What do you think I'd better say to him?"

"If you will allow it, I'd like to put in a word just here," spoke up the High Horse.

"Put it in," the mayor invited.

"Well, it's just this: I have an awakened interest in this mystery, and I have an idea I am on the right scent. I wish you would delay answering the letter for twenty-four hours and give me a chance to prove whether I am right or wrong."

A proposition which was readily agreed to.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FAILURE AND A BIG SURPRISE.

NATURALLY, the mayor and the mine-manager were eager to learn what the clue was the sport professed to have found.

High Horse, however, would not disclose that, yet, and he pledged the others to secrecy respecting his having taken hold of the matter.

Both Mayor Bob and King John had confidence in him, and were willing to give him a chance whether anything came of it or not. He was already well liked.

Night had by this time settled down.

The day had been a quiet one, save for the little incident between High Horse and Silly Gilly.

The Pony Express, as the star route rider was called, had arrived, as shown by the communi-

cation Major King had received from Deadwood Dick.

The stage, too, coming at the close of the day, about on time, had about its average quota of passengers; and so the day had ended and given way to its successor—night.

When the High Horse finished his conversation with the mayor and the manager, he set forth to find Silly Gilly.

He wanted to have some further talk with the fellow about that mysterious message; so, he bent his steps in the direction of the saloon where the witless fellow was generally to be found at any hour.

This place, by the way, was known as the "Jag On." No place in the world like your Western camp for odd names. This one was striking for its tameness, as compared with some.

The place contained many of the roughest roughs and toughs of the camp, and as the sport entered they looked at him much as a pack of wolves might have done.

The High Horse entered boldly and carelessly, smoking a cigar and returning look with look.

He had his eyes well about him, evidently, and his ears too.

Soon espying the fellow he sought, he approached him, the man giving a start and turning somewhat pale at sight of him.

"Don't be alarmed, Gilly," the High Horse tried to reassure. "I'm not going to try to scare you this time; I merely want you to do a favor for me. I'll give you a dollar if you will."

The fellow's face brightened.

"What is it?" he asked eagerly. "I'll do it if it's anything I kin."

"Oh, it is something you can do easy enough, or I would not ask you. You are the only one who can do it, in fact."

"Well, tell me."

"I want you to take an answer back to the person who sent that note to me by you. You can do that, I know. And, you'll be a dollar in pocket—"

"No, no, can't do it, can't do it!"

"You can't do it?"

"Oh, no."

"And why not?"

"Was told not to bring any answer to it."

"Yes, but this can't hardly be called that, now; I'll wait here till you return."

"No, no, I can't do it; I'll be killed if I do. That's what I was told when I fetched it. I'd be shot if I went back, for then you would foller me. That's the reason. No, can't do it."

"But, I'll stay right here till you come back."

"No, no; that don't make any difference; was told not to come back or I'd be killed."

"Why would she kill you?"

This was a bait thrown out, but the fellow did not bite.

"I didn't say it was a he or a she," he quickly declared. "I ain't goin' to tell nothin'."

"I'll give you five dollars if you'll tell me who it was sent that note. Come, now, that is something worth having; who was it?"

"No, no, I won't do it, fer I promised I wouldn't; and I'd only be killed anyhow, so what's the use? I ain't goin' to do it, so ye might as well let me be; you can't make me tell."

"Well, that settles it, then; I won't urge you any further. I would not want to see you killed, you know. I'll tell you what you can do, though, if you want to, and there won't be any harm done by that. I suppose you know what was in the note you brought, don't you?"

"No, sir; I can't read."

"Well, it was a warning to me. You can tell the party that I am independent, from the ground up, and will do as I please about a certain matter. Can you remember all that?"

"Maybe so, but I ain't sure. I don't promise you nothin'. But, say, will you tell me how that string was to be throwed the other half of the way up to the wire? It has got away from me, and I can't get et back again ter save me. How was et to be done?"

The sport took pains to explain the point, to gain the poor fellow's confidence, if possible, after which he rose to take his leave.

He had noticed that some of the roughs of the den had been closing up around the place where he was seated.

One of these now accosted him:

"Say, Mister Man, don't be in a hurry, now; stay long nuff ter git 'quainted, can't yer?"

"Oh, I'm not in the least hurry, boys," was the cheery response the sport made. "You're welcome to get acquainted all you want to, with me."

"Then stay awhile an' neighbor with us. Can't ye set 'em up fer ther crowd? You look as ef ye

was sufferin' wi' piles, ef ther showin' on ther outside counts fer anything."

"That's so; ther outcroppin' is mighty good."

"Plenty of pay dirt in sight."

"You bet. Hal ha!"

These and other brief remarks were made about the glittering sport's appearance, and he took it all in good part.

"That's all right, boys," he said, "but you don't want to go too much on appearances, you know. Maybe the claim has been salted, and isn't worth a copper below the surface."

"Thar's enough on ther surface ter stand a treat fer ther house, anyhow," one fellow reminded.

It might have passed at that, but one burly bullwhacker was not satisfied to have it so.

"That ain't w'ot we want," he blurted out. "We want him to pay his footin' hyer, pards, *that's* w'ot we want, an' w'ot we're goin' ter have, too, you bet! Let him shed off them 'ar dimings an' things, an' we'll 'tend to ther treatin' ourselves."

"Thet's et!" another voice echoed, promptly; and several others fell in with the idea.

The sport buttoned his coat tightly, a grim expression coming into his face. His magnetic eyes flashed ominously. They did not know their man yet.

"Is that your game?" he asked, quietly.

"Et is!" the big fellow avowed.

"I was going to say I would stand treat all around."

They took it for a sign that he was "weakening," and it only made them the more determined.

He was there alone, in about the worst hole the camp could boast, and they thought they had him in a tight place and could do as they pleased with him.

This same camp of Hard Knocks had been the cause of complaint for similar offenses before. The victims had complained to the mayor, and he had tried to right the matter, but there it had ended.

As a rule, the guilty ones were conspicuously absent, and the victim could not point out a single rascal, with certainty, and declare he was the man. Besides, a wholesome warning had been given, and in most cases the victims had put up with their losses and gone off without a word of complaint.

"Ye was, was ye?" sneered the big bullwhacker. "We don't want et; ye jest shed them 'ar dimings."

The sport took off his rings, deliberately; also a big flashing pin from his scarf, and the crowd of toughs began to smile at the ease with which they were playing their game.

"Who will take them?" the sport asked.

"I wull, that's who!" answered the bullwhacker, promptly.

"All right; let me know when you begin, will you, please?" and the High Horse made a quick pass and the things had disappeared in his pocket.

The bullwhacker immediately let out a bellow, and sprung forward to grapple with the "dood," as some one in the crowd had called the sport; but never in all his life met he with a greater surprise.

There was a sharp clip! and Mr. Bullwhacker was lifted clear off the floor and sent headlong into the crowd.

"Anybody else want to get acquainted?" the sport coolly asked.

He spoke as though nothing unusual had happened, as though this was an every-day occurrence with him.

For a moment the crowd was spellbound, but not for long. With a howl some ten or twelve of the worst of the lot made a rush, intending to overpower the "dood" and bring him to the floor.

Then there was fun!

The sport's fists playing out so lightning-like as to be almost unseen sent men spinning away in every direction, and in about a quarter of a minute he had cleared a good space all around him.

And that done, he whipped out a brace of revolvers.

"Does anybody else hanker to make my acquaintance?" he asked as coolly as ever.

He had opened the eyes of that crowd—those he hadn't closed, and they could only stare at him in open-mouthed amazement.

The big bullwhacker had got upon his feet, and his hand was upon a weapon, but he stood like the rest, almost paralyzed with surprise at the prowess displayed by one so tame-looking.

"Want anything further of me?" the sport repeated. "I am here to introduce myself, if you do. You opened the ball, and I'm ready to

do my part toward keeping it rolling. You don't seem anxious, I guess. Very well, just make a wide passage from here to yon door, and I'll bid you good-evening and retire."

Without a word of comment such a passage was made, and the High Horse backed out and made his way to the White House.

In less than twenty minutes his name was on every lip in the camp.

He was the "tallest boss" they had ever seen.

CHAPTER XV.

HIS MAJESTY AGAIN.

It was quite late in the evening when the High Horse was next seen.

He had been in his room, or so it was supposed, and the evening was well advanced when he left the hotel and crossed to the Nickel Plate.

The citizens of Hard Knocks were out in force to get a new look at the man who had tamed the tigers of the "Jag On" for the first time in the history of the camp, and he was expected at the Nickel.

When he entered a hum of comment ran 'round the room, and an almost silence prevailed.

Blushing Blanche was at her gaming-table, and Dashing Diantha, too, was present.

The latter rose immediately and advanced to meet the sport, saying:

"Sir Sport, allow me to congratulate you! We have all heard what you have been doing for the tigers of the Jag On; it is the first time their claws have ever been clipped."

"Oh, that was nothing," the High Horse waived; "just a little misunderstanding, that was all. It was settled in a moment, as soon as I had properly introduced myself. I count those very fellows as my friends, now that we are better acquainted. I thank you all the same, however."

"I propose a cheer for the High Horse," the woman offered for consideration. And she spoke sweetly, beaming upon the crowd in her most gushing manner.

The cheer was given with a will.

When it ended the sport bowed his acknowledgment, and advanced toward the table where Blushing Blanche sat.

Dashing Diantha was right by his side, or nearly so, as though she had a right there and as though the sport was entirely willing to acknowledge it.

"How progresses the game, fair Blushing Blanche?" the High Horse asked.

"Very tamely, sir," was the answer. "Are you willing to risk something against the strength of my bank?"

"And be cheated so deucedly clever that you'll never know how it was done," Dashing Diantha supplemented, aside, but plenty loud enough to be plainly heard by all around.

"No, I don't care to play!" the sport answered, before Blushing Blanche could take Dashing Diantha up. "I thought I would look on, however, if there was anything of interest going on. Do not let me interrupt the playing, but go ahead with your deal."

"And I could make it interesting, I think, sir," spoke up Diantha, "were it not for the limit she imposes against me. She is afraid to meet me honestly in a fair contest. Does it not stand its own proof?"

"She probably manages her game to suit herself," the sport answered.

"That is just what I do," the fair dealer quickly declared. "Thank you for one word for me, sir."

"You need not thank him," flashed Dashing Diantha. "He is too much a gentleman to tell you bluntly just what his opinion is of you."

"I happen to know what his opinion is of you, all the same."

"You would have reason to be proud were it half as good of yourself," the angry retort.

"I have given you both to understand what my position toward you is," the High Horse here put in.

"We don't want no trouble hyer, ladies," Hank Hornblower cried out, as he pushed his way to the front.

"Then let her keep still," snapped Diantha.

"It was you begun it," cried Blanche.

"You lie, Red-face!"

"What!"

Blushing Blanche leaped to her feet, a weapon in hand, her face more nearly pale than any person there had ever seen it.

She was not quick enough for the "drop," however, for Dashing Diantha had a weapon in hand at precisely the same moment, thus they stood and glared at each other like she tigers.

"Curse you!" hissed Diantha, "the end may as well come now as any time."

"Just as well," answered Blanche, grimly. "I have put up with your insults as long as I can."

For the moment the crowd had stood spellbound, expecting the women to fire immediately, but as they did not, the men laid hold upon them and pulled them away from each other.

They fought furiously, but they were soon overpowered and disarmed, and so were kept from doing harm then, at least.

"We'll settle it!" cried Diantha.

"You are right we will!" retorted Blanche.

"I'll meet you any time you say, and to the death."

"You can't meet me too soon, now. I'll set a time. We can't do it now."

"We'll keep that to ourselves. Your life has got to pay the cost of all you have heaped on me."

"No; but yours shall be mine, for what you have done to me, you had better say," the other retorted. And thus they kept it up till Diantha was forced from the place and taken to the hotel.

Blanche closed her game, being too upset to conduct it longer, and without a word further to anybody went to her rooms.

As soon as she had gone the crowd fell to discussing the situation in groups here and there.

The hour was late when the High Horse left the place.

He had remained late on purpose.

Engaging in a quiet game with the proprietor, Hank Horn, just for pastime, the pair had kept it up till after midnight, when the crowd was well thinned out.

"Then, taking time for some talk with others before leaving, the lights of the camp were for the most part out when at last he took his leave to cross over to the hotel to retire for the night.

The night was dark, and the street about deserted.

He took no care to look about him, but advanced leisurely in the direction of the White House.

Only a little distance had he proceeded when a shadow emerged from around one of the buildings adjoining the Nickel Plate, taking the form of a man as it came forth into the semi-light.

Not a sound was heard, yet swiftly the man advanced toward the sport, and the light from the saloon glinted upon the blade of the knife he held in his hand. That he meant mischief was certain, but no one saw him, or if any one did see him it was not made known.

Swiftly and all too surely he crouched forward, the sport seemingly unsuspecting, and when his victim was about in the middle of the street, its darkest part, the would-be assassin lifted his knife for the deadly blow.

The sport, apparently all unconscious of his danger, did not stop or turn, evidently having heard no sound from the cat-like villain.

The murderous knife was lifted; then like a flash the blow descended.

There was a thud, and simultaneously a sharp click and a ringing sound, and the broken blade of the knife went flying high in air!

Now the sport, turning leisurely, faced his intending murderer, and reaching out, laid hold upon him with a grip that admitted of no escape. The fellow was masked, but the sport did not expose his face.

Holding him with the power of a vise with one hand, with the other he drew a ready knife and clipped a bit of cloth from the fellow's shoulder. It was done so quickly, too, that in the dark the man could hardly suspect what was being done, so great his fright and amazement.

"No, I won't kill you," the sport quickly said, flourishing the knife before the assassin's eyes. "You have not harmed me, however good your intention was, so I'll let you go with a warning not to try it again. Take this as a gentle reminder."

With that he jerked the fellow around and applied his boot to him soundly.

That done, he allowed him to go, and the rascal made off in haste.

It seemed a strange proceeding, or would have so seemed, had any one witnessed it. Here High Horse had undoubtedly had the murderer of Connor and Wilson in his hands, and yet he allowed him to go free!

What did it mean?

We shall see.

"I'll bet he was a surprised man," the sport said to himself, as he entered his room. "He counted upon another victim, but his blade

found something tougher than human flesh to encounter. Hal! hal! I'll bet it gave him a pain in the wrist, for he struck with full force. A coat of mail is not to be sneered at."

He referred, of course, to a coat of mail. He had put it on before going out that evening. He had evidently expected just what had happened.

Just after daylight on the following morning the camp was awakened by a great shouting on the street.

The good citizens—likewise the bad—came tumbling out in haste, and the few already abroad pointed attention to the tight wire overhead.

There once again appeared his Satanic Majesty, just as he had been seen on the first occasion, walking carefully down toward the center of the wire where the banner still waved.

He was balancing himself with his pole, as before, and appeared to be perfectly at home on the slender footway. Some men in the crowd wanted to try a shot at him, but the mayor was on hand and threatened to shoot any man who dared to fire. He wanted to see the end of the business.

The wire-walker moved on, and by the time he reached the middle over the street the whole camp was out to see him.

There he stopped, and as on the other occasion, carefully stooped.

Untying the banner that was on the wire, he allowed it to fall, and it came fluttering down to the ground.

In place of it he secured another, and having made it fast he allowed it to fall to the breeze, rising with a wave of the hand to the crowd so far below.

This time the banner was of black, with white letters. It was about the same size and shape as the other, and the words it contained were plainly read from the camp beneath.

It was worded thus:

"HONEST CITIZENS, REJOICE!

"I have marked my own and will soon gather them in.

"SONS OF BELIAL, TREMBLE!"

Cautiously the mysterious marauder turned and carefully retraced his steps the way he had come, the crowd eagerly watching, as before, everybody talking and the whole street seeming like Bedlam let loose. Few, if any, however, saw the man leave the wire, for before he came to the place where he had let himself down on the other occasion something else took place to draw attention.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRAND EXPOSE.

SHOUTING had drawn attention, and further up the street, to the west of the hotel, was seen something well calculated to excite the camp.

There appeared Blushing Blanche and Dashing Diantha, each with a revolver in hand, and they were backing away from each other and making ready to settle their feud in blood.

"Hi! thar!" yelled out the mayor, as soon as he took in the situation; "none o' that, gals!"

"Keep your distance," called Dashing Diantha. "I'll drop the first man who attempts to interfere here."

"Part 'em, boys!" the mayor cried loudly. "This hyer sha'n't be; who ever hear of sech a thing as wimmin fightin' wi' pistols?"

"Keep away, I tell you!" Diantha warned yet again. "It will be death to any man who comes between us; you have fair warning and I mean it, too."

"What ther doose is ter be done, sport?" and the mayor appealed to the High Horse. "Et's a disgrace ter 'low them two wimmin ter stand up thar and peg away at one 'nother."

"I think it's a wholesome scrape to keep out of," the sport made answer. "Besides, there is no time, for they must be near their distance now, and bullets will be flying before you can say Jack Robinson. See the crowd hunt cover, will you; hal! hal! ha!"

The mayor saw it, and he saw something more besides.

"Look thar at Silly Gilly!" he called attention. "What does ther blame fool think, he is goin' ter do?"

The simpleton had run forward, and placed himself in front of Blushing Blanche, throwing up his arms and shouting:

"Don't you shoot, Dashin' D'anthy; don't you dare to shoot her! She is mine, and you sha'n't hurt her!"

He waved his arms wildly, as if he could ward off the danger.

"You fool!" Diantha cried. "Take that!"

She fired, and the foolish fellow fell; but, even

as he dropped, the weapon of Blushing Blanche spoke and Diantha herself dropped to the ground in the same moment.

Blushing Blanche threw her revolver down, then, and turning, held up her hands, saying:

"Come, mayor, make me prisoner if you want to; I'm willing to stand trial for this."

The crowd immediately came out and pressed forward, the danger over.

High Horse, the sport, was among the first on the spot.

He stooped immediately over Silly Gilly.

"Dead," he announced, rising. "The murderer of Connor and Wilson has paid for his crime!"

"What!" cried the mayor. "You don't mean to tell us Silly Gilly killed them two men, do ye?"

"It was no one else, sir," the sport assured. "He tried to do the same for me last night, but I balked him. I intended arresting him this morning, but he has been called to a higher court. See here, the mark I put on him last night when I had him in hand."

He indicated the hole in his coat, and brought out the piece to fit it.

"My men saw me cut this piece out of his coat last night, and know all about the circumstances," he observed.

"Your men?" cried the mayor. "What do ye mean?"

The sport smiled.

"Let us go to the piazza of the hotel," he answered, "and there I will explain all that is mysterious to you now. But, what of the woman? Is she dead?"

Others had run to where Dashing Diantha had fallen, among them Major King, and he now reported the woman to be dying. She was taken up and carried into the nearest house.

The body of Silly Gilly, too, was carried away, and the mayor, with Blushing Blanche a prisoner, accompanied the sport to the hotel.

The mayor, the sport, the mine-manager, Hank Hornblower and other leading citizens were there on the piazza; the crowd assembled in the street in front.

The High Horse, stepping to the edge of the piazza, spoke:

"Citizens of Hard Knocks, I owe an explanation to you, but before I make it you will allow me to call my assistants, with their prisoners whom they have been gathering in."

Amazement was pictured on every visage.

The sport placed a silver whistle to his lips and blew a ringing signal, to which immediate response was given from various directions.

He waited, and the crowd stood staring at him, in wonderment. Now that they sized him up carefully, after the prowess he had displayed in the Jag On, of which every man of them had heard, he seemed to have grown wonderfully.

While they waited thus the Gypsy woman, Madame Madalene, came out from the hotel and took her place by the sport's side, laying her hand upon his shoulder. And rapidly, one after another, men came forward, each with a prisoner in hand, and all of these found room on the piazza.

The excitement which prevailed was intense.

Then it was that the High Horse and Madame Madalene unmasked, and there stood forth Deadwood Dick, Jr., and his brave and noble wife, Kodak Kate!

There were some in the crowd who recognized them, and a great shouting immediately went up, which quickly took the shape of three rousing cheers and a roaring tiger for the Detective Prince.

Dick waved them to silence.

"My friends," he spoke, "some explanation is due you. I was planning to come here in the interest of some men who had been robbed in the Jag On over there, and who had engaged me to come and recover some valuable papers, if possible, when I received word from Major King to come and solve the mystery of the double murder. Knowing that I would be recognized here unless I came in disguise, and knowing that I could do but little if known, I planned to come as you have seen."

Cheering again.

"In order to have attention fully drawn to something else, I engaged the wonderful wire-walker you have seen, and his part was simply to divert your attention from other matters. The plan worked well. Then, in order that I, as the High Horse, might not be unmasked or recognized, I sent word to the major that I could not come for a time yet. By these means I have had a clear field and a full chance to work, and you see the result. I had the murderer in my hands last night, but wanted to let

him go free till this morning when I intended arresting him in public. Loving Blushing Blanche, he was determined that no one else should have her, and he intended killing every man who paid attention to her. He was deeper than he was thought to be, and could read and write when it suited him to do so.

"These other prisoners are all well known to you. I have carried out both operations well, and accomplished both ends. Each of these is guilty of some crime, and I'll take care that each gets what he deserves. I have also recovered most of the stolen effects belonging to the men who engaged me first. My brave wife here, whom I am proud to introduce to you, has done her part nobly. But for her my success would not have been anywhere near as perfect as it is. And my other aides, every one, have done their parts well. The banner now waving over your camp is one you can look at in satisfaction, I think. The black is indicative of the fate of these prisoners; the white speaks of the purifying the camp has undergone. We came here with the intention of making a clean sweep, and I guess we have done it. There is nothing more of importance for me to say, for all the minor points are readily understood, with the light you now possess."

He closed with a bow, and the cheering ran wild.

As it subsided the mayor stepped to the front, leading Blushing Blanche, and he said:

"Boys, Blushin' Blanche has a word or two to say to ye. Jest give her your 'tention. I think we'll let her go fer killin' D'anthy; et was a fair fight anyhow, I opine."

"It was she who ruined my life," the woman spoke up instantly. "She won the love of my husband away from me, and as I have ever believed, killed him, for he died soon after he ran away with her. We have been bitter foes, and she has crossed my path many times since. Here you have seen how bitterly we hated. I might have married again here, but she again robbed me. Then came the murder, and I believed her guilty. She thought the same of me. When this stranger came we were each determined to win him from the other, though neither really cared for him, of course, and you know how it has all come out. Mayor Smith, do with me as you see fit."

"What's ter be done?" the mayor demanded, referring it all to Deadwood Dick.

"Let her go!" Dick decided. "She's the better of the two, and it was a fair fight, anyhow. Let her go, if she leaves Hard Knocks, for good, as I know she will."

So the mayor set her free, and thanking Dick, she immediately took her departure, going across the way and hiding herself in her room, never more to be seen in Hard Knocks. How or when she left the camp no one ever knew.

"Mister Deadwood Dick," a voice in the crowd called out, "thar is one question I would like to ask ye."

"Very well; ask it, sir," Dick gave leave.

"How in ther tanel did ye git that 'ar wire across ther gulch, and how did ye fasten et up thar on ther peaks?"

"Easily explained," Dick responded. "A thread of silk was fired across, after several efforts, with a rifle, and once that was secured the rest was plain sailing. A stronger thread was drawn over, then a stronger still, and finally the wire. The performer you have seen—he will soon be here, now—is one of the most skillful climbers in the world, and he managed to secure the wire high up where you see it."

From that the hero of the hour went on to explain other points, and by the time he was done the wire-walker came and was introduced.

But, what need to say more? The story has been told.

The rascals were punished, every one, and Hard Knocks was a better place after the visit of Deadwood Dick and his allies than it had ever been before. And her citizens have nothing but praise for the Prince of the West, hero of a hundred thrilling tales.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,

98 William Street, New York.